192 PAGES

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION

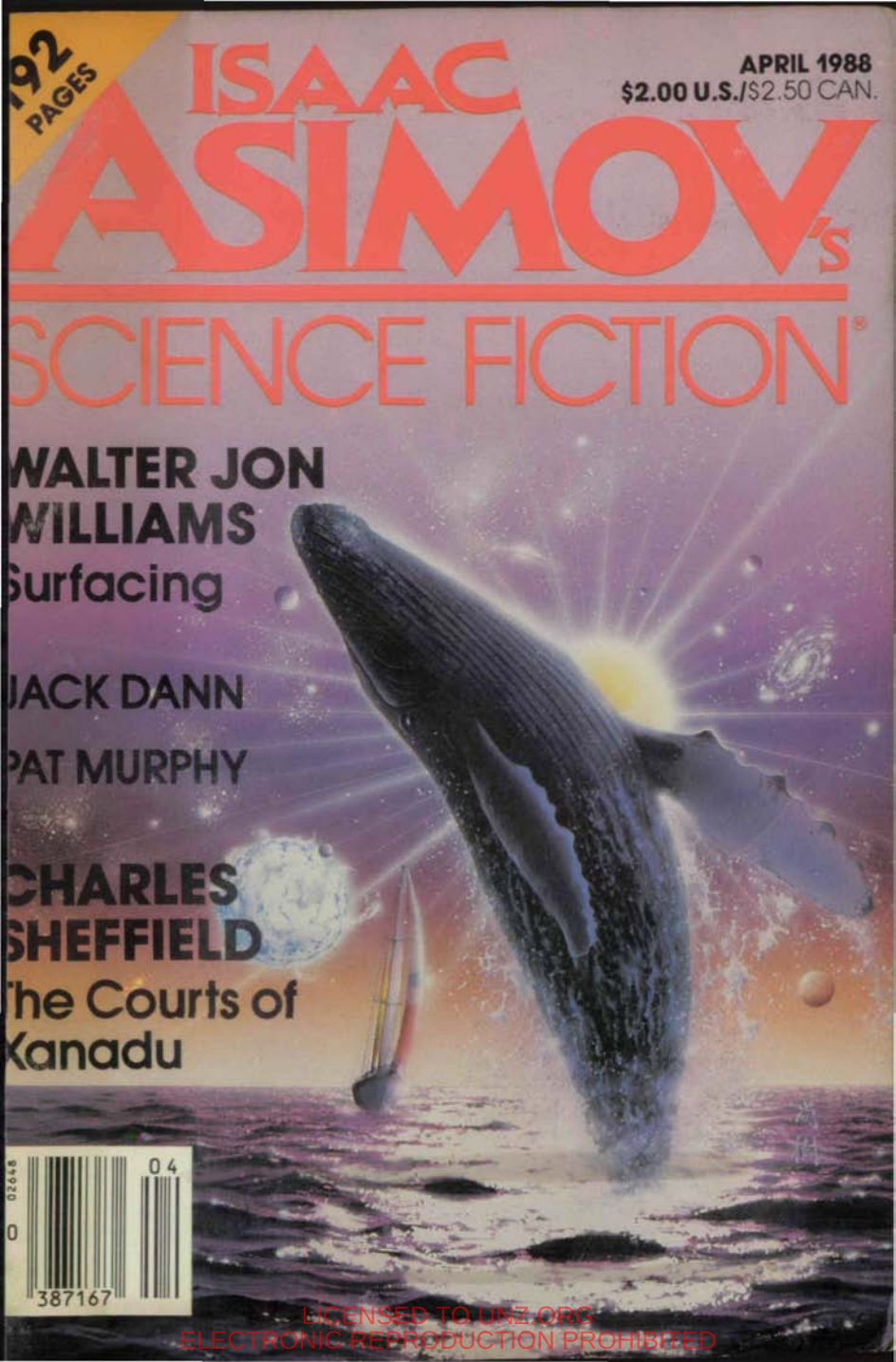
APRIL 1988
$2.00 U.S./$2.50 CAN.

WALTER JON WILLIAMS
Surfacing

JACK DANN

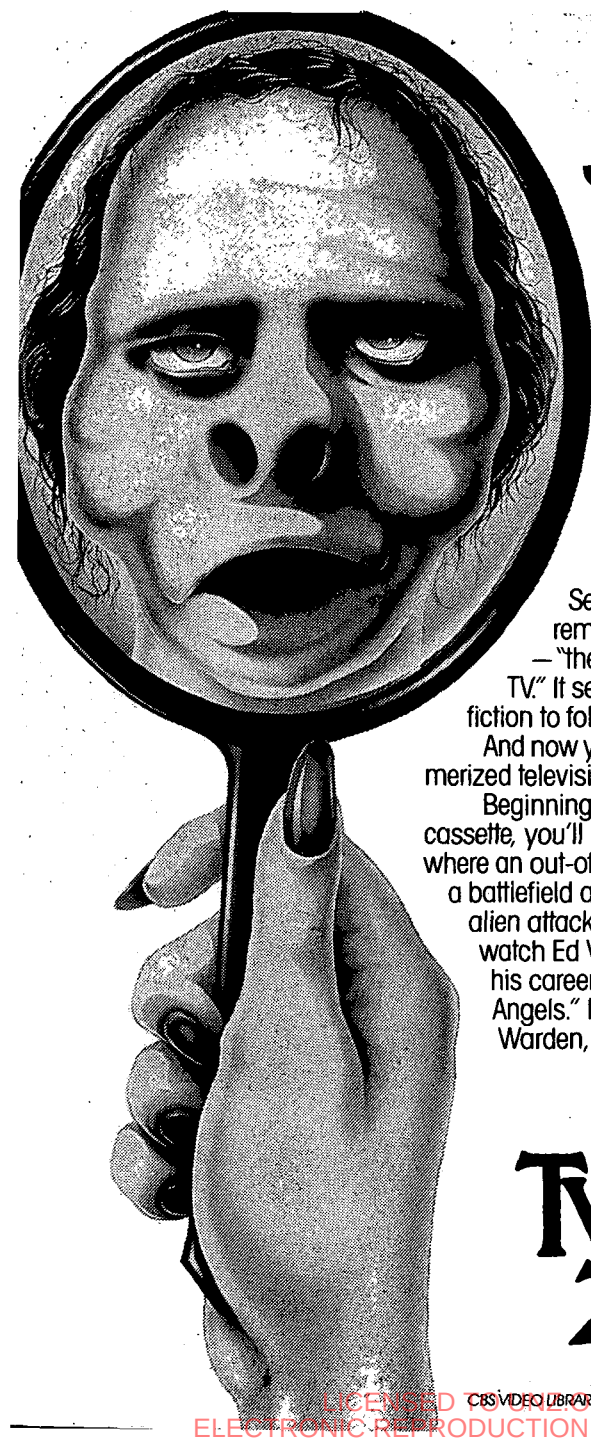
PAT MURPHY

CHARLES SHEFFIELD
The Courts of Kanadu



0 02648 04
387167

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



JOURNEY IS IN THE

Come face to face with a new meaning of beauty, a meaning that exists only in *The Twilight Zone*. And enter a dimension where the ugly are normal and the beautiful are damned.

Created some thirty years ago by the genius of Rod Serling, *The Twilight Zone* remains as the critics described it — "the most imaginative half hour in TV." It set the standard for all science fiction to follow.

And now you can visit the place that mesmerized television viewers everywhere.

Beginning with your first four-episode cassette, you'll be transported to a dimension where an out-of-the-way farmhouse becomes a battlefield as Agnes Moorhead fends off an alien attack in "The Invaders." Then you'll watch Ed Wynn make the sales pitch of his career to Mr. Death in "One For The Angels." In "The Lonely," starring Jack Warden, you'll see a man's love bring a

THE TWILIGHT ZONE

CBS VIDEO LIBRARY 1400 North Fruitridge Ave., Terre Haute, IN 47811

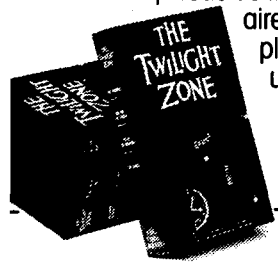
LICENSED TO CARL SAGAN
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TO WHERE BEAUTY EYE OF THE BEHOLDER.

robot to life. And, of course, "The Eye Of The Beholder" gives a bizarre new twist to an old saying.

It's all yours for only $4.95 plus shipping and handling when you subscribe to the series.

Then, about every four to six weeks you'll receive another four-episode videocassette. You'll see Talky Tina menace Telly Savalas in "The Living Doll" and William Shatner take the plane ride of his life in "Nightmare at 20,000 Feet." What's more, you'll watch each episode as it originally aired—complete and uncut. Plus each cassette arrives in an exclusively designed matching case, so the Collection will look great on any bookshelf.



Your visit to *The Twilight Zone* is risk-free, too. Take 10 days to preview each cassette and pay just $29.95 plus shipping and handling for each one you decide to keep. There's no minimum to buy and you can cancel your subscription anytime.

Cross over to where fantasy and reality merge. Mail the coupon, or for faster service, call toll-free (credit card orders only) 1-800-CBS-4804 (in Indiana, call 1-800-742-1200). And get ready to enter *The Twilight Zone*, a new dimension in entertainment.

Take your first videocassette for only $4.95
(plus shipping and handling with subscription)

CBS VIDEO LIBRARY

Dept. TDN, P.O. Box 1111, Terre Haute, IN 47811

YES, enter my subscription to *The Twilight Zone* under the terms described in this ad. Send me my first videocassette (four episodes) at the low introductory price of $4.95 plus $2.45 shipping and handling, which I'm paying as indicated below (*fill in*). Also, send me future videocassettes (at $29.95 plus $2.45 shipping and handling) on ten-day approval, with no obligation to purchase.

Check One: ☐ **VHS** ☐ **BETA**

Check how paying:

☐ **CHECK ENCLOSED** FOR $7.40* ($4.95 + $2.45). Future cassettes billed with shipment.

☐ **CREDIT CARD.** Charge my series purchases, beginning with $7.40* for my first cassette, to: ☐ American Express ☐ VISA ☐ MasterCard ☐ Diners Club

T13
T14

Account # _____ Expires _____

Signature _____

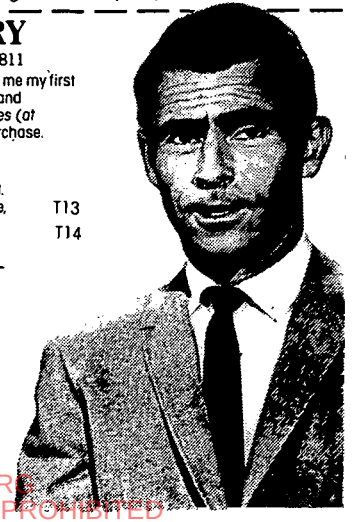
NAME _____
(please print)

PHONE ( ) _____

ADDRESS _____ APT _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Note: CBS Video Club reserves the right to reject any application or cancel any membership. Offer limited to continental U.S. (excluding Alaska) and Canada. Canadian residents will be serviced from Toronto (offer may vary). **Applicable sales tax added to all orders.**



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SHARON GREEN'S
ultimate novel in the epic
Terrilian Series

TERRILIAN

THE WARRIOR VICTORIOUS

For all of the other Primes, New Dawn was a pleasure planet. But for Terril it was a prison —where she alone dreamed of escape. And while she sought a means to free herself, other forces were focusing their attention on the planet. For Terril and the other Primes could prove to be the most powerful weapon the universe had ever known—bringing peace under the right leadership...or conquest under the wrong masters.

Don't miss the other Terrilian novels:
THE WARRIOR WITHIN (#1)
THE WARRIOR ENCHAINED (#2)
THE WARRIOR REARMED (#3)
THE WARRIOR CHALLENGED (#4)

$3.95 Distributed by NAL

DAW FANTASY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

126

85

60

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION®

Vol. 12 No. 4 (Whole Number 129)
April 1988
Next Issue on sale
April 5, 1988

Novella

126 Surfacing — Walter Jon Williams

Novelettes

20 The Courts of Xanadu — Charles Sheffield
60 Tea — Jack Dann
88 Under the Covenant Stars — John Barnes

Short Stories

78 Suffer the Children — Rick Wilber
85 Tags — Robert Frazier
118 Good-bye, Cynthia — Pat Murphy

Departments

4 Editorial: Eccentricity — Isaac Asimov
9 Letters
18 Gaming — Matthew J. Costello
183 On Books — Baird Searles
192 The SF Conventional Calendar — Erwin S. Strauss

Poem by Roger Dutcher

Cover art for "Surfacing" by Hisaki Yasuda

Isaac Asimov: Editorial Director
Gardner Dozois: Editor
Sheila Williams: Managing Editor
Joel Davis: President
William F. Battista: Publisher

Published 13 times a year by Davis Publications, Inc. at $2.00 per copy ($2.50 per copy in Canada). Annual subscription of thirteen issues $19.50 in the United States and U.S. possessions. In all other countries $24.20, payable in advance in U.S. funds. Address for subscriptions and all other correspondence about them, P.O. Box 1933, Marion, OH 43305. **If you have questions regarding your subscription call (614) 383-3141.** Address for all editorial matters: Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10017. Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine® is the registered trademark of Davis Publications, Inc. © 1988 by Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017. All rights reserved, printed in the U.S.A. Protection secured under the Universal and Pan American Copyright Conventions. Reproduction or use of editorial or pictorial content in any manner without express permission is prohibited. All submissions must include a self-addressed, stamped envelope; the publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. Second class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian third class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. POSTMASTER, send form 3579 to IAsfm, Box 1933, Marion OH 43306. In Canada return to 625 Monmouth Rd., Windsor, Ontario N8Y3L1. ISSN 0162-2188.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORIAL

by Isaac Asimov

ECCENTRICITY

"Eccentricity" is from a Greek phrase meaning "out of center."

If you were to place the axle precisely at the center of a perfectly round wheel, the radii (that is, the distance from the axle to the rim of the wheel) would be equal everywhere. The wheel would therefore turn in such a way that the cart, or other vehicle, would move along smoothly, always at the same distance from the ground.

If, however, the axle were out of center, the distance from the axle to the rim of the wheel would increase and decrease as the wheel turned, so that the cart would move up and down as it progressed, and the motion would be disagreeable indeed, to say nothing of wasteful in its energy expenditure. Anyone, in this respect, would prefer centricity to eccentricty.

We can make an analogy in matters of personality. If a given person behaves exactly as we would expect an average person to behave in all possible ways, then he would present us with no surprises (surprises are far more apt to be unpleasant than pleasant, as we all know) and we would get along comfortably with him. He would be centric. (He might also be boring, but that's another story.)

If, however, a person were different from the norm in one respect or another, he might jar upon us whenever that difference showed up and we would feel uncomfortable. He would be "eccentric."

Not one of us behaves at the norm in all possible ways. We all have our little eccentricities. Usually, these are small and not particularly noticeable to others, particularly where interaction takes place only rarely. (Where interaction is constant, as between husband and wife, eccentricities which might originally have been easily ignored can grow to be so noticeable as to become unbearable. Hence couples may peer at each other through thick clouds of hatred and wonder what they saw in each other to begin with.)

In some cases, though, eccentricities may be so extreme that everyone notices and resents them even when contact is sporadic or rare. Life for such true eccentrics can be hard.

But then, even wild eccentricities can be forgiven under certain circumstances. If a person is pow-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

erful, because of his social, political, or economic position, others are forced to accept his eccentricities. Then, too, if a person is thought to be unusually intelligent or creative, there is some feeling that eccentricity comes with the territory and must be accepted. A lame person *must* limp, and a creative person *must* be eccentric.

I profit by this, of course (and you knew I would get round to myself, didn't you?). When I was young, and was viewed as an unpleasant boy who startled people by being far more perceptive than he appeared, my eccentricities were all reported to my parents with great indignation. (When I was six or so, I was reported as standing on the corner gazing up at the sky during a snowstorm. Actually, I was watching the snowflakes, which were dark against the clouds but instantly turned white when they moved downward against the buildings, and was wondering why that should be so. My mother, however, pulled me into the house and lectured me endlessly to the effect that I must cease my peculiar behavior.)

As I grew older, however, and as I came to be viewed as an unusual person in a more complimentary sense, my eccentricities were more and more tolerated, until now they tend to be viewed as lovable. Or, as my dear wife, Janet, says bravely, "Oh, well, I guess it's all part of his charm." I could see this happening in the matter of my penchant for writing science fiction. What was

ISAAC ASIMOV:
Editorial Director
GARDNER DOZOIS:
Editor
SHEILA WILLIAMS:
Managing Editor
EMY ETERNO:
Editorial Assistant
RALPH RUBINO:
Corporate Art Director
TERRI CZECZKO:
Associate Art Director
RON KULINER:
Senior Designer
ANTHONY BARI:
Junior Designer
DENNIS DOYLE:
Junior Designer
CAROLE DIXON:
Production Manager
ROBERT J. ALLEN:
Production Assistant
CYNTHIA MANSON:
Director Subsidiary Rights
FLORENCE B. EICHIN:
Permissions & Contracts Manager
VEENA RAGHAVAN:
Public Relations
Promotions Manager
SONYA CASTELLUCCI:
Circulation Director Retail
Marketing
PAUL CHRISTIAN:
Circulation Planning Director
LAURA GUTH:
Circulation Director Subscriptions
RISA LUND:
Advertising Services Manager
ADVERTISING OFFICES
NEW YORK
(212) 557-9100

WILLIAM F. BATTISTA:
Publisher

JOEL DAVIS
President

FRED EDINGER
Senior Vice President
Finance

PAULA COLLINS
Senior Vice President
Circulation

CARL BARTEE
Vice President
Manufacturing

Please do not send us your manuscript until you've gotten a copy of our manuscript guidelines. To obtain this, send us a self-addressed, stamped business-size envelope (what stationery stores call a number 10 envelope), and a note requesting this information. Please write "manuscript guidelines" on the bottom left-hand corner of the outside envelope. The address for this and for all editorial correspondence is *IAsfm*, Davis Publications, Inc. 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10017. While we're always looking for new writers, please, in the interest of time-saving, find out what we're looking for, and how to prepare it, before submitting your story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

treated as an unbearably irritating piece of behavior when I was in my twenties, came to be taken as an admirable talent by the time I was in my forties.

About the only eccentricity I have that still unsettles people, however, is the fact that I won't travel. It has always bothered them that I simply won't get onto an airplane, but what they find utterly unbelievable is that I don't like to leave home *at all* and that, when I am forced to, I make the trips as short as possible in both time and space and count the hours till I get back home.

Personally, I don't see why that is considered eccentric. Until perhaps this last half-century, travel was very much an unusual thing. The vast majority of people didn't travel for lack of opportunity, and probably didn't brood about it. But now that technological advance has become commonplace, why is it absolutely *necessary* that we do so? Why is it considered odd and reprehensible if someone doesn't want to?

After all, technological advances have now made pacemakers and bypass operations commonplace, but where is the idiot who would ask to have such things if he didn't need them—just to be fashionable?

Why don't I travel? People ask that all the time. Several reasons. When I was young, my family didn't travel because we were all tied down day and night, every day and every night, by the family candy store. (No, I don't resent that, looking back on it. It kept us secure throughout the Great Depression, and the newsstand made it possible for me to read science fiction.)

The result was that I never learned to travel in the first place. And since my home was always an emotionally secure place (my parents were unaccountably fond of me despite my eccentricities) I was never driven by a wild yearning to leave it.

Then, as I grew older and gradually became that odd thing, a "prolific writer," I found that once again, I was tied down day and night, every day and every night, not to a candy-store but to a typewriter. (Perhaps my early candy-store experience had ground that pattern of behavior into me, so that I was forced to find a substitute as a way of making life tolerable. Perhaps I'm a prolific writer only because that's the closest I can come to being back in the candy-store. If so—who cares?)

Of course, since my dear wife, Janet, is not as home-bound as I am, I periodically make trips that don't take me too far for too long, in order to make her happy. (I enjoy her being happy.) On those occasions, however, I take pads and pens and, when no one is looking, I write. I was at Mohonk Mountain House (our favorite resort) for five days last June and I returned with three stories.

People say to me, with astonishment, "But don't you ever want to see the Grand Canyon or the Taj

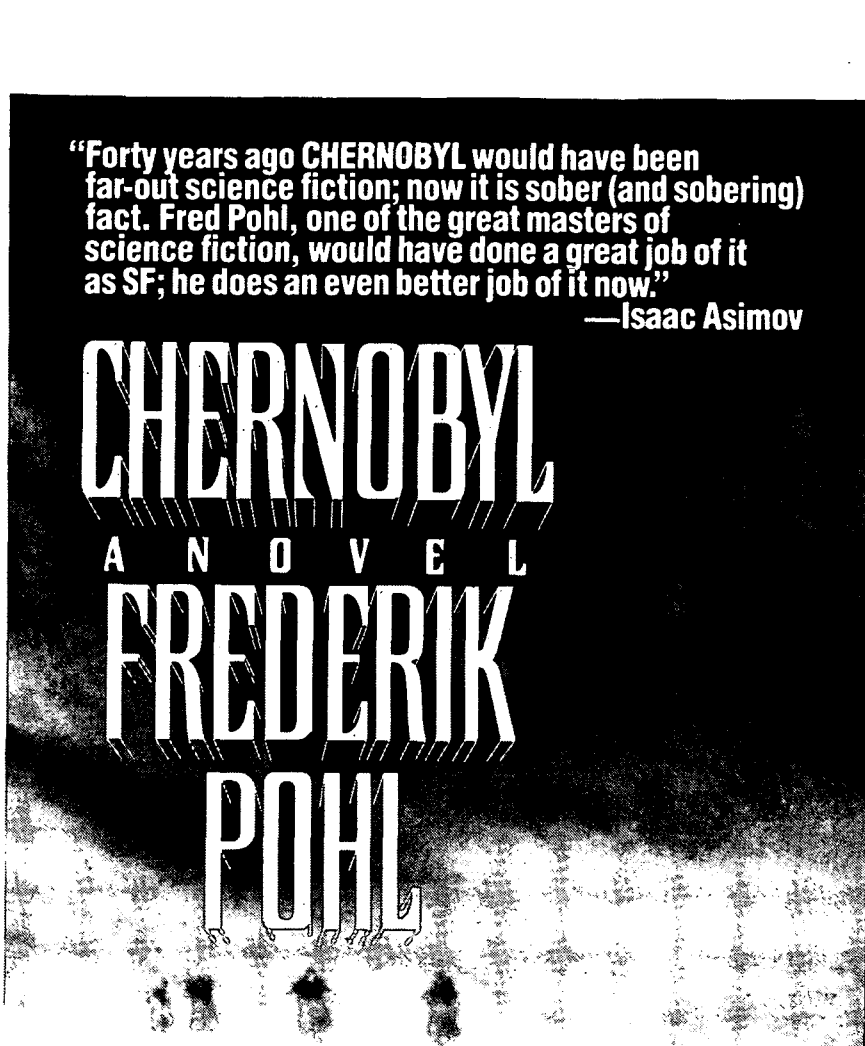
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Forty years ago CHERNOBYL would have been far-out science fiction; now it is sober (and sobering) fact. Fred Pohl, one of the great masters of science fiction, would have done a great job of it as SF; he does an even better job of it now."
—Isaac Asimov

CHERNOBYL

A NOVEL

FREDERIK POHL



"A noble book. . . arguably the best Frederik Pohl has ever written."
—*The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*

"A well-executed thriller. . . Brings the story home."
—*San Francisco Chronicle*

"A first-rate documentary novel."
—*Chicago Sun-Times*

SPECTRA

BANTAM

NEW YORK • TORONTO • LONDON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mahal?" My answer always is, "Of course, provided someone brings them to Manhattan."

And, as a matter of fact, that has saved me from Hollywood. Whenever I am asked to do something for the movies or television, I always say, right away, "You must understand that I won't leave New York," and that usually ends the negotiations right there. It doesn't mean that I don't get involved, on occasion, but such involvement only takes place when it can be carried through by phone, by correspondence, or by having someone from Hollywood come to New York.

Nor do I feel I am cheating myself by cutting myself out of the visual-media experience. Far from it.

Gardner was telling me only recently of a superlatively talented science fiction writer, who was an ornament of our early issues, and who has now transferred his efforts to Hollywood. He has, I am told, written no fewer than six screenplays, each for a larger sum than the one before. Even the first netted him much more than he could have earned by writing something similar for us. *However*, and it's a big "however," not one of the screenplays has been made into a movie.

You may say, "Well, so what? He's making money, isn't he?"

Yes, certainly, but consider—suppose that, instead of six screenplays, he had written six novels and they had been printed. His advances would have been far smaller than what he received from the Hollywood moguls, but the books would have continued to sell and to earn royalties. He could have sold first serial rights to magazines. He could have made fairly lucrative paperback sales and any number of foreign sales. After a while, his earnings might not have fallen so far short of the Hollywood mark.

Then, too, these six novels would have helped make his name increasingly familiar to the public so that it would become steadily easier to sell new books and more copies of each book. The six nonproduced screenplays, on the other hand, not only earn him no additional money over what he has already received, but, by not appearing, help diminish the value of his name—out of sight, out of mind, you know. (In fact, even if the screenplays are produced, who notices the writer's name in comparison with the names of the actors and directors?)

Then, too, a printed novel generally appears very much as it was written. Editors usually make only minor changes. Screenplays, however, are wrenched out of shape by actors, directors, producers, mothers-in-law, second cousins, and casual passers-by. The writer may very well end up with a changeling he is ashamed of.

So I'm glad my eccentricity has saved me from all of this. Being a homebody has kept me comfortable, happy, proud of my work—and quite well-off, too. What more can I ask for? ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LETTERS

Dear Gardner:

Who's this guy Alexander Jablokov who did "At the Cross-Time Jaunter's Ball" in the August issue? The guy's terrific. Story reminds me vaguely of an old one of mine called "Trips," but only superficially, and in any case he handled it entirely differently and with great power. Amazing the way guys this good keep coming out of nowhere.

Best,

Bob Silverberg
Oakland, CA

These guys, Bob, came out of the same place that you and I came out of in our time. I must admit, though, that it did occur to me that after I showed up on the scene, these youngsters might cease coming—but they don't. It doesn't seem fair, somehow, that you and I, Bob, must compete with them under the disadvantage of having aging brains.

—Isaac Asimov

Doctor Asimov,

Concerning the question you posed in your editorial on unification, it is my personal opinion that a "Terran Federation" would be nothing but beneficial to the human race. Currently society is in what would be referred to as a "pre-revolutionary" stage. The various governing powers of our fair planet are going nowhere. Our saving will come by a joining of technological and creative forces. The benefits from our American scientists joining those of other countries would be enormous. As a concerned citizen of this planet and as a genius I feel that our only chance of advancement in terms of technology and society would be the total unification of our scientists. The first step is to get rid of the lawyers.

Joshua Michael Conyer
Kettle Falls, WA
EWNI MENSA

The remark about lawyers is, of course, a quotation from Act IV of Shakespeare's Henry VI, *Part II. The last communication I got from my own lawyer (also a good friend) was a bill, along with a cartoon which shows a lawyer talking to a client and with the caption reading, "As a lawyer, I feel it is my duty to charge you a great deal of money."*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Kelly,

I just finished reading "The Glass Cloud" in the June issue of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* and I wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed it. In addition to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the pleasure of reading a well-written story, I had the fun of encountering familiar locales and scenes sprung free of the late twentieth century.

I lived in New Hampshire for several years, and I've climbed throughout the White Mountains, including the Webster Cliff Trail. I make my living now as an actor here in New York, but a few years ago I did a season of summer stock at the Eastern Slope Playhouse in North Conway, so I can imagine the horror of being on that strip south of town on a day when a half million people are expected to show up in the valley. (I suppose the only error I could find in the story is that the Theatre-By-The-Sea, I hear, has closed down. Of course, who's to say it couldn't have reopened by 2056? *Ars longa.*) Since I have to send this letter through the magazine, I can only guess that you live up in that area yourself or have spent a lot of time there. At any rate, you brought back memories for me and gave me an intriguing glimpse into the future of places I know. It's stuff like that, along with good writing, that makes a reader want to write an author and say thanks.

Sincerely,

John Griesemer
New York, NY

When I was very young, I was told that it helps to write about what you know. I realized that this meant I would be condemned to writing about very little, because I had then (and still have) a remarkably circumscribed life. So I took to writing science fiction on the ground that I knew as much about a planet I made up as anyone in the world. But there's no question, as Mr. Griesemer points out, that authentic local color helps.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. A,

You know, I never thought that I would be writing to a science fiction magazine to point out a mistake that I noticed in a story. I generally read them for the entertainment and I am not technically educated enough to spot some of the problems that come up.

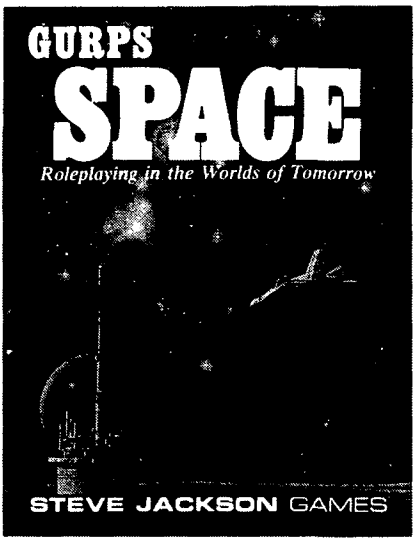
I just finished reading the marvelous story by Alexander Jablokov, "At The Cross-Time Jaunter's Ball." I love the story. But I felt really uncomfortable with one tiny portion, a reference to the Columbia River and the Puget Sound in the same area. I live on the banks of the Columbia and I have been up and down this wonderful river lots of times. It runs into the Pacific Ocean at Astoria and from nowhere along its length can the Puget Sound be found. That is in Northwest Washington, about 250 miles north of the mouth of the Columbia. It's a great place to get oysters, but never connects with our river. Jablokov's concatenation of the state of Washington sure cut out a lot of great countryside.

I have subscribed to your magazine for several years now and I would hate to miss a single issue. I enjoy the mix of stories, even the fantasy that's tossed in from time to time. I never really felt that any of the arguments on content were necessary, except that the book is always too short.

Mr. Dozois, Ms. Sheila, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Create Your Own Universe!



GURPS, the *Generic Universal RolePlaying System*, already covers the worlds of horror, fantasy, post-holocaust adventure, and more. Steve Jackson now presents the long-awaited roleplaying sourcebook for the worlds of the future: *GURPS Space*.

This 112-page book has all the rules and background you need to create a universe to *your* specifications . . . or to recreate any of your favorite science fiction stories with a gaming background. Use it with the *GURPS Basic Set*, or as a sourcebook for any other game system.

GURPS Space includes detailed, state-of-the-art scientific guidelines for building star systems and habitable worlds; flexible rules for starship design and combat; high-tech weapons from light swords to plasma guns; scaly aliens and variant humans; effects of FTL technology on interstellar society; and much more.

GURPS Space and the *GURPS Basic Set* are available at your favorite hobby store. Or order by mail (prices include shipping and handling): $13.50 for *GURPS Space*; $27.50 for the *Basic Set*. (Texas residents, please add $1.00 or $2.20, respectively.) Send a long SASE for a free catalog.

STEVE JACKSON GAMES
Box 18957-J Austin, TX 78760

GURPS is a registered trademark of Steve Jackson Games Incorporated.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

everyone there, keep up the great work and keep sending me my favorite magazine. And Dr. A, thanks for being you!
Peace—

Janelle Child
White Salmon, WA

You are luminously correct, but there is a tendency to confuse distant geographies of all kinds. There was an anatomy professor who never stopped laughing at my having located the spleen on the wrong side of the body in my own book on anatomy. (Fortunately, she caught and corrected the error before the book saw print.)

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

Your points about the dangers of disunity ("Unification," August 1987) are well taken. And the notion that the United States of America might still exist ten thousand years from now certainly strains one's credulity—though it might make a good story if you can come up with a plausible rationale.

On the other hand, due consideration must be given to the dangers of putting all one's eggs in one basket. I keep thinking of the millennial stagnation of China and Egypt. And let us not forget Rome, where the result of unity was not only stagnation but destruction. (I once read that in the second century A.D. the Roman governor of Britain tried to secede from the Empire. How different history might have been, had he succeeded!)

Look at the history of the Europeans, with French against English against Spanish against Portuguese. The disunited Europeans exploded across the face of the globe, competing with each other all the while, and stamped their culture on the entire world.

While this was going on, various European governments tried to suppress the science of Galileo and the philosophy of Locke: but they failed, because Europe was not united.

In our century we have seen several nations go through what can only be called "dark ages"; the Soviet Union, Germany, China. Iran, Southeast Asia, and Ethiopia are in dark ages right now. Recovery from such a dark age is possible only because each is limited to a certain area. Civilization continues elsewhere, and the ideas of civilization tend to leak across boundaries.

Now imagine what a dark age would be like in a World State. There would be no refuge for persecuted ideas—or persecuted people. People would not even know they were in a dark age, because there would be no islands of civilization with which to compare themselves.

From this dark age, there would be no recovery.
Sincerely,

Taras Wolansky
Kerhonkson, NY

No one suggests a monolithic World Government with all power concentrated in a single executive. That either wouldn't work at all or would lead to an intolerable tyranny as you say. I'm talking about a Federal *World Government with checks and balances. Of course,*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there would always be the danger of its tipping too far in one direction or another. We have been fighting off an "Imperial Presidency" in the United States for forty years now. But we've got to labor to make it work, though, for the present situation is clearly unworkable.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I was mildly impressed with your August 1987 editorial when I first read it. Since then, I have become much more impressed with your ideas on the desirability of federation. But I am less enamored with your subsequent positive comments about strong central governments and distant bureaucrats. These two concepts seem to be at odds with each other. Of the two, I prefer the first.

Without doubt, excesses against citizens occur within federations. But, without doubt, they occur less often and less profoundly than they do under strong central governments. Excesses by strong central governments are legion. Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany, and Amin's Uganda are only three of many examples from the recent past. You said that if given a choice, you would prefer to be governed by a distant bureaucrat than by a neighborhood bully. I must confess that until now I haven't given it much thought. But now that I have, I think I would vote for the neighborhood bully. If I am mistreated by the neighborhood bully, I can appeal to the distant federation that controls him.

It seems to me that, in theory at least, the ideal situation is where local entities (States) perform the day-to-day functions of governing, subject to rules enforced by a federal entity.

In consequence, it seems to me that the only valid argument against a world federation is that it might not remain a federation. Certainly, had Hitler been subject to the rules of such a federation, his persecution of the Jews, at least to the extent that it did, could not have occurred. The danger is that people may not have patience with the federation idea, and desire that the federation be strengthened. Then, too, the federation government itself may decide to govern directly. When that happens, we are well on the road to *1984*.

By the way, I have been an Asimov fan for a long time. I read your magazine although I really don't care too much for this "new wave" stuff. I would prefer more Asimov-type stories to go along with your thought-provoking editorials.

Highest regards,

Clifford H. Beall
Broken Arrow, OK

Once you establish a World Federation, you will, of course, have to be on constant guard against its turning sour. Thomas Jefferson said, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." Our Constitution was tested in the Civil War and in such lesser (thank goodness) events as the Watergate hearings and the Iran-Contra hearings. Would you have ducked the chance of forming an American Union because you foresaw the difficulties that would periodically arise?

—Isaac Asimov

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dear *IAsfm* Editors:

I have been sampling your wares for over a year now, and finding them satisfying indeed. A multitude of comments, criticisms, and kudos have been sorting themselves out in my soul, and I'd like to pass them on to you.

First, the appreciations. Thank you for:

1) Publishing so many *good* stories. They rarely fail to intrigue, fascinate, entertain, or move me. There are far too many good authors to list here, but I will say that I can't get enough of Lucius Shepard.

2) Publishing poetry at all, and so much excellent poetry at that.

3) Consistently high quality artwork appropriate to the stories.

4) Stimulating and controversial nonfiction.

5) The fact that your pre-story blurbs and artwork do not telegraph the story's plot. You are always so careful not to give anything away; I bet the writers appreciate that as much as I do.

6) Using a single-column format in the stories. This may seem picky to some, but I find a two-column format harder to read and somehow demeaning to the story.

Here are the criticisms:

1) The poems are lost in the table of contents. Couldn't you add "poetry" as another category (like "novellas," "novelettes," "short stories," and "departments"), and list the page, title, and author as you do with the rest of the fiction and articles? Just because poems are usually shorter than stories doesn't mean they should be afforded second-class status. At *least* list their page numbers—it's very frustrating to try to find particular poems.

2) Why *do* you insist on that ridiculous "192 pages" triangle?

3) Dammit, I can't think of any more.

Mr. Dozois, I am glad you are editor of this magazine. Many years ago I was impressed by your editing skills in *A Day in the Life*, one of my favorite anthologies. Now, I enjoy the acerbic humor in your all-too-rare appearances in the Letters column. And, Dr. Asimov, I will take exception to one of your statements some time back: you said that no one could call Mr. Dozois "beauteous." You should know that some of us out here find him quite attractive.

One last note: I was devastated, as I am sure many were, by the death of Alice Sheldon, alias James Tiptree, Jr. When the July issue appeared in my mailbox the next day, featuring her story "Yanqui Doodle," the irony was more than I could bear; I could not even begin to read it. After some weeks had passed, and the grief had calmed, I was finally able to read the story. And there, unabated, quite alive, was all Tiptree's potency and passion. Through the medium of that very unsettling story, I came closer to accepting her death. Though I know you could not have foreseen its effect, I thank you for publishing it when you did. I am sorry she will write no more.

Sincerely,

Cynthia L. Moore
Tempe, AZ

I don't know if we'll be able to hold our magnificently Chestertonian Gardner down at ground level now. He has waved this letter in my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

face and demands that I refer to him only as "beauteous." He has also taken to primping before the mirror and suggesting that we place his face on the cover. We may have to sedate him.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Gardner,

It was with a sense of stunned disbelief that I learned of the tragic deaths of Alice B. "Raccoona" Sheldon a/k/a/ James Tiptree, Jr. and her husband, Huntington Sheldon, in the June 12, 1987 issue of the *Comic Buyer's Guide.*

Ironically, the July issue of *Asimov's* arrived at the bookstore the same day, and I read Tiptree's "Yanqui Doodle" with eyes opened by events I feel sure you had no inkling of when it was first scheduled for publication.

Synchronicity supplied other moments of irony in the pages of July's *Asimov's*—in the good Doctor's reply to letter writer Bill LeFleur regarding the late Stephen Tall, "Alas, even science fiction writers are mortal" and in his response to Morgan S. Brilliant: "I wish upon you the curse of remembering—"

The first James Tiptree, Jr. story I remember reading appeared fifteen years ago, in the pages of the much-missed New Dimensions anthology series, edited by Robert Silverberg (also in the July *Asimov's).*

"Filomena & Greg & Rikki-Tikki & Barlow & The Alien" was in *New Dimensions 2* with your own "King Harvest," Gardner, and it was that rarity—a genuinely funny SF short story—that influenced my ambition to write fiction. (I still chuckle, recalling Tiptree's helicopters ". . . going woodchuck-woodchuck.")

That ambition led to a career of writing for a living and the appreciative enjoyment of many wonderful Tiptree tales; in the collections, *Warm Worlds and Otherwise, Star Songs of An Old Primate, Out of the Everywhere,* and in Tiptree's novels *Up the Walls of the World,* and *Brightness Falls from the Air.*

But after reading Tiptree's "Yanqui Doodle," a profoundly moving story on the futility of war and the terrible rage of Don Still, one of those ill-used "tin soldiers," something about his "Gue" adversaries stung my memory.

"Beam Us Home" was the last story in Tiptree's first collection: *Ten Thousand Light-Years from Home.* Published in 1969, it marked the first appearance of the Guevarista guerillas that I had recognized in "Yanqui Doodle."

I read the story in my *Star Trek*-struck late teens, with a strong sense of identification, and a yearning, mawkish, if-it-were-only-true faith that embarrasses me now.

The poignant blend of meaningless violence and *Trek*-derived optimism that spoke through Tiptree's protagonist Hobie rings more earnestly true now than it did nearly two decades ago. As Hobie sadly put it ". . . I believed they were real, you know? Kirk, Spock, McCoy, all of them."

In intervening years I have lost family members and friends, to age, disease, and violence. And re-reading "Beam Us Home," given the events that have followed it,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inspires that all-too-human yearning once more.

And I pray that if whatever justice there may be prevails in this mad entropic universe, that Alice and Huntington concluded the tragic events of last May 19, in a place "clean and friendly," where "they don't torture people." Like Hobie on the bridge of his not-quite *Enterprise,* whispering "I know where I am," and then yelling "I'm HOME!"

So good-bye Don Still and Hobie and Huntington and Alice/Raccoona a/k/a/James Tiptree, Jr. We never had the opportunity to meet, but as The Alien wistfully said in that story I so strongly recall, "I'll never forget your song."

Ken Davis
Walkerton, IN

PS: I strongly urge fellow SF readers/writers to nominate Tiptree's "Yanqui Doodle" for this year's Hugo and Nebula Awards.

I have written an editorial on the subject of Alice Sheldon (a/k/a James Tiptree, Jr.) and it appeared in the January issue. I hope you saw it.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Good Doctor:

I have been a subscriber for many years and a faithful reader of your books for longer than I would like to admit. I avidly read *IAsfm* and thoroughly enjoy every issue. In my opinion yours is the best fiction magazine published. This is due to the fact that you print the very best in fiction no matter what its label may be.

Now, Good Doctor, it is time to be honest. You do not publish a "science," "fantasy," or "speculative" fiction magazine. I have read stories that can only be described as "mainstream" fiction (whatever that is) in *IAsfm.* It is time to rename *IAsfm Isaac Asimov's Fiction Magazine.* This magazine will print only the best fiction submitted. But I get the feeling you are already doing this and the only thing you need to change is the name. Keep up the good work.

Now for my real beef. Your faithful readers realize that you like and enjoy bad puns and bad jokes. I am glad your book publishers have twisted your arm to write more fiction. As a result I have seen your name on the best sellers list. (I thought that was reserved for mainstream fiction authors.) I bought (hard bound) a certain robot book that was basically a murder mystery. I sat down and read the thing in one sitting only to find out (pass the lead candle-stick) the butler did it.

AARRGGHH!!

Yours in need of a real doctor,

Mark D. Oviatt

We have the temptation to publish any good story that comes our way, but we do make an effort to find stories that have some *science fictional element. The name of the magazine will stay as it is, therefore, in order to remember that little thing.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

A local used bookstore (actually, that probably should be used-book store) sells copies of old digests for twenty-five cents apiece, so I am

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

responding to an issue which has no doubt been forgotten. But I would still like to share my two cents worth of insight/opinion on the matter of collecting. In your editorial in this issue, your main objection to collecting was on space limitations, cost, and time considerations. My objection is one of ethics. I knew this guy in college who boasted a collection of at least fifteen hundred plus science fiction books. By now it must be well over two thousand plus. But he hadn't read even half of them. What he had effectively done was taken fifteen hundred plus books out of circulation. People who *really* love literature don't *hoard* it, they share it. Maybe I'm crazy, but that's my opinion.

Bill Bohrer
Austin, TX

PS: The mag is swell. As with all things, sometimes it's good and sometimes I hate it. At least you steer clear of all that elves/ swords/ conehead-barbaric crud. I'm a hardware junkie myself. Airlocks and pressure suits are my fix.

That's your opinion because you don't make your living out of writing. You have a bank account, I suppose. Do you hoard it, or do you share it among your friends? You have clothes, I suppose. Do you hoard them or do you hand them out to different people? Has it occurred to you that there's no such thing as hoarding books? Publishers can always print more. If everyone had your attitude and would rather borrow than buy, pretty soon there would be no books at all because writers would be forced to do something else for a living.

—Isaac Asimov

ISAAC ASIMOV's SCIENCE FICTION® Magazine

is pleased to announce that Orson Scott Card's "Hatrack River" (*IAsfm*, August 1986) won the 1987 World Fantasy Award for Best Novella.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GAMING

by Matthew J. Costello

I was walking with my son as we both hauled our bikes up a much-too-formidable hill.

"So," I asked him, "what do you think of *Captain Power?*"

As a healthy, normal first-grader, I knew he had already seen a number of ads for the interactive video game. "It looks neat," he said, pointing out the obvious.

I then mentioned casually some of the things people were claiming about *Captain Power*'s more sinister aspects. Not only is the "show" a thirty-minute ad for the toys (as is *He-Man* and the many other toy-based programs), but *Captain Power* sets up two classes of viewers—those who have a collection of the toys (which interact with the program during a special five-minute segment), and those who don't.

I guess the image I painted of the poor kids sans *Captain Power* gear was sufficiently touching to move my son's little heart, because he soon said that perhaps the toys shouldn't be advertised.

And he wouldn't be alone.

According to Candace Irving of Mattel Toys (5150 Rosecrans Avenue, Hawthorne, CA 90250), Mattel has been called to Washington to defend *Captain Power*'s presence on the airwaves. The main point seems to be that this isn't simply a case of *Winky Dink* circa 1988. (*Winky Dink,* for those of you who are not baby-boomers, was a show that featured a plastic screen that fit over the TV tube. Children would draw on it to help out Winky. Sometimes, to the chagrin of their parents, enterprising children would draw right on the screen.)

Captain Power, though, makes the toys an almost necessary part of watching the show, and it's been mentioned that that may be an improper thing to be doing with our children (and their parents).

Before continuing, let me describe the *Captain Power* package. There are, of course, a series of toys—all of which are capable of "firing" at the TV screen and also recording hits. For example, the Power Jet XT-7 is a heavy, hand-held plane that can sense when you've aligned its gun with the strobing target on the screen. If you hit, it adds to your power points. If you're hit (by incoming, strobing flashes), you lose power points. If you're out of power points, your Power Jet will eject its pilot (the actual figure of the pilot is, of course, an extra, and can you imag-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ine any kid not wanting one when the empty seat pops out?).

The "Captain Power and the Soldiers of the Future" TV programs feature live action and exciting animation of high-tech dogfighting on alien terrain. The object is to stop Lord Dread and his evil biomechanical creatures. The battle-training tape starts with Captain Power giving his "Power On" cry (which activates your ship). The action is very slick, and hitting the enemy vehicles is not easy.

While the play of the game is as promised, with lots of "stay on targets" and "head for the monuments," I found it wearying holding my fighter and plugging away at the baddies. The actual on-screen action is, of course, unaffected by anything the player does.

Arriving fast on the heels of *Captain Power* is *Action Max* (Worlds of Wonder, 4209 Technology Drive, Fremont, CA 94537), produced by the company that released *Laser Tag*. This is a more complex, and somewhat more fascinating item. There is a control base, much like a video game console, which records your score and allows you to plug into your VCR. You can set the distance control and align your gun, attach headphones, and select the number of players. *Action Max* uses live-action videotapes and isn't (as yet) tied to a TV show. The headphones provide lifelike explosion sounds, announce when you've hit a target, and produce a bouncy upbeat sound track for all the mayhem. *Sonic Fury*, a *Top Gun* clone, and *The Rescue of Pops Ghostly* have been released, with submarine battles and police academy training tapes promised. Of the two, the ghost busting tape was the most entertaining and childlike.

Some thoughts, then, on these novel games. The technology is impressive but ultimately disappointing. Both systems made me long for a true interactive video game, a promise offered by RCA's recently announced DVI (Digital Video Interactive) disk system. It grows quickly boring, for an adult at any rate, to simply be blasting away at targets.

The *Captain Power* manual features a disturbing photo of four children aiming at each other with their chunky plastic ships, and asks, "Who'll get blown up first?"

But forgetting the single-minded militarism of these games, the larger problem I have is the lack of opportunity for imaginative involvement. The shows are professional, vivid, almost overwhelming presentations. There's nothing to imagine. The player's role is simply to keep firing (while an on-tape voice says, "Good work, ace"). There's no possibility for varying from the scripted scenario.

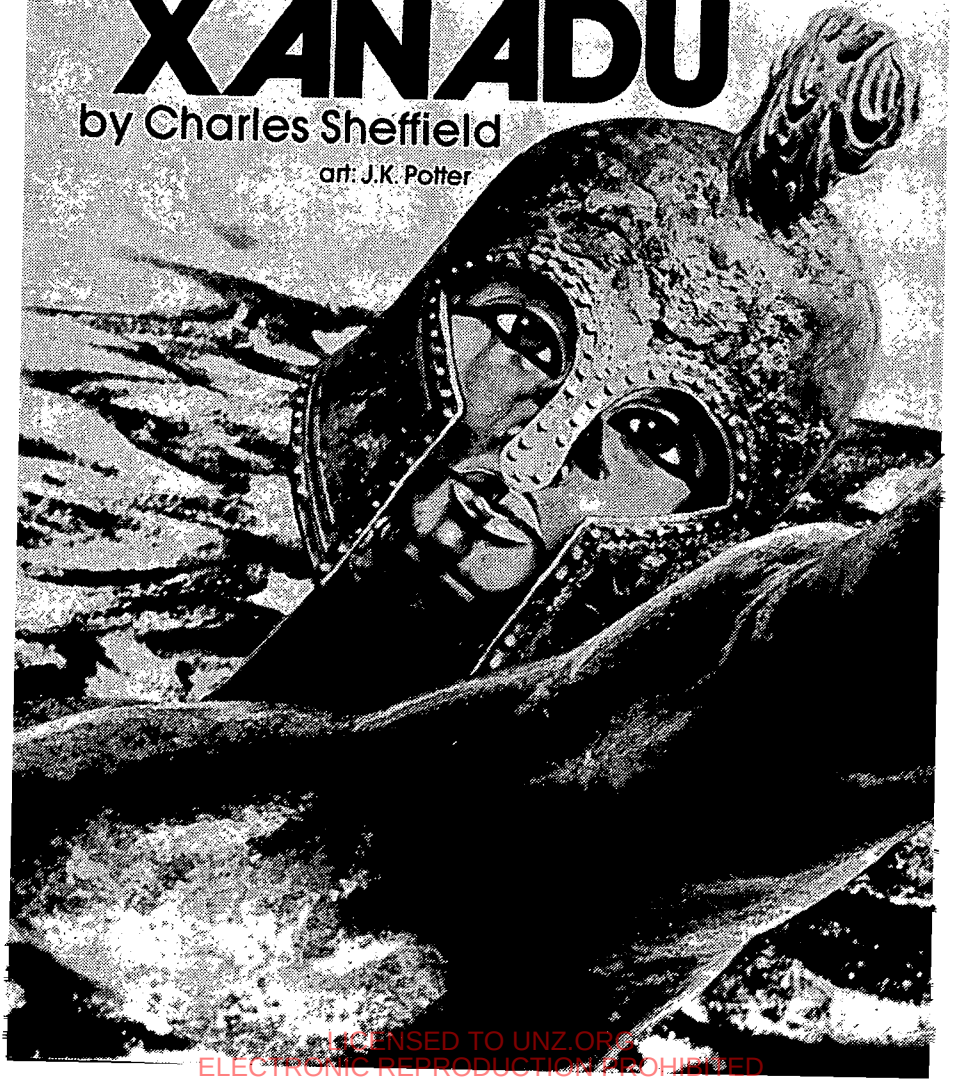
I can't help thinking that if some company tried to actively involve the children with a full spectrum of fantasy, even using the somewhat limited interactive technology, they'd leave behind all the mundane space battle games that currently flood the market. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE COURTS OF XANADU

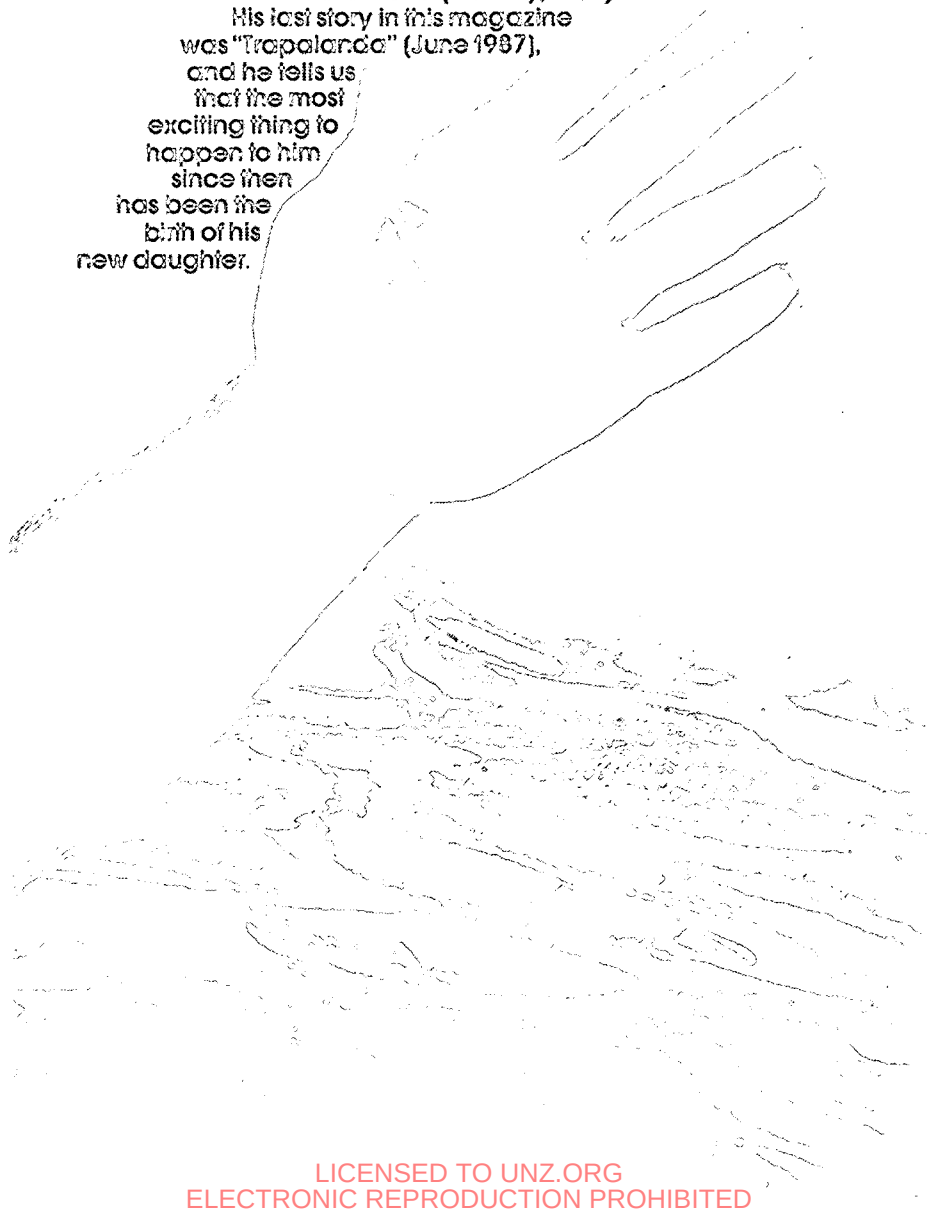
by Charles Sheffield

art: J.K. Potter



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Charles Sheffield's latest novel is *Trader's World* (Del Rey, 1988). His last story in this magazine was "Trapalanda" (June 1987), and he tells us that the most exciting thing to happen to him since then has been the birth of his new daughter.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The eagle's way is easy. Strike north-north-west from Calcutta, to meet the international border close to the little Indian town of Darbhanga. Fly on into Nepal, passing east of Kathmandu. After another hundred miles you encounter the foothills and then the peaks of the Himalayan range. Keep going—easy enough when you fly with the wings of imagination. You traverse silent, white-capped mountains, the tallest in the world, float on across the high plateau country of Tibet, and come at last to the Kunlun Mountains. Cross them. You are now in China proper, at the southern edge of the *Takla Makan Shamo*, one of the world's fiercest deserts, a thousand miles from east to west, five hundred from north to south.

If you are driving, or walking on real feet, you have to do things rather differently. The Himalayas are impassable. The Tibetan border is patrolled. Travel in the Tibetan interior is restricted.

Gerald Sebastian made the trip to the Takla Makan in two different ways. The first time he was alone, traveling light. He sailed from Calcutta to Hong Kong, flew to Beijing, and then took the train west all the way to Xinjiang Province. He was a celebrity, and his presence was permitted, even encouraged. However, his trip south from Urumqi, into the fiery heart of the Takla Makan desert, was not permitted. It was difficult to arrange, and it took a good deal of bribery.

Today's Chinese, you will be told by their government, do not accept tips or bribes. Just so.

Sebastian's second visit to the *Takla Makan Shamo* had to be very different. His three-week disappearance on the first trip had left the Chinese authorities uneasy; they did not want him back. For his part, he did not want anyone in China to know of his presence. This time he also had four people with him, and he needed a mass of equipment, including two large, balloon-wheel trucks.

The trucks were the obvious problem; the four people—five, if one includes Sebastian himself—would prove a worse one. The group consisted of the following: one world-famous explorer and antiquarian, Gerald Sebastian; one wealthy, decorative, and determined woman, Jackie Sands; one NASA scientist, Dr. Will Reynolds, as out of place on the expedition as a catfish on the moon; one China expert, Paddy Elphinstone, fluent in the *Turkic* language spoken in Xinjiang Province, and in everything else; and one professional cynic, con-man, and four-time loser, convinced in his heart that this expedition would be his fifth failure.

How is it possible to know what a man believes in his heart?

It is time for me to step out of the shadows and introduce myself. I am Sam Nevis. I was along on this expedition because I knew more about treasure-hunting, wilderness excavation, and survival in the rough than the rest of Sebastian's helpers put together—which was not saying much.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And by the time that we were assembled in Sebastian's hotel room in Rawalpindi, ready to head north-east out of Pakistan, I already knew that the expedition was going to be a disaster.

It was not a question of funds, which is where three of my own efforts had failed. Gerald Sebastian had enough silver-tongued persuasiveness for a dozen people. How else could a man raise half a million dollars for an expedition, without telling his backers what they would get out of it?

I had seen him cast his spell in New York, three months earlier, and knew I had met my master. He was a bantamweight, silver-haired and hawk-nosed, with a clear-eyed innocence of manner I could never match.

"*Atlantis*," he had said, and the word glowed in the air in front of him. "Not in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, as Colonel Churchward would have you believe. Not at Thera, or Crete, in the Mediterranean, as Skipios claims. Not among the Mayans, as Doctor Augustus Le Plongeon asserts. But *here*, where the world has never thought to look." He whipped out the map, placed it on the table, and set his right index finger in the middle of the great bowl of Xinjiang Province. "Right here!"

There were half a dozen well-dressed men and two women sitting at the long conference room table. They all craned forward to stare at the map. "Takla—Makan—Shamo," read one of them slowly. He was Henry Hoffman, a New York real estate multimillionaire who also happened to be Mr. Jackie Sands. He was seventy-five years old, and she was his third wife. He leaned closer to the map, peering through strong bifocals. "But it's marked as a *desert*."

"Exactly what it is." Gerald Sebastian had paused, waiting for the faces to turn back up to meet his eyes. "That's what the word *shamo* means, a sand desert—as distinguished from a pebble desert, which is a *gobi*. This is desert, extreme, wild, and uninhabited. But it wasn't always a desert, any more than there were always skyscrapers here on Manhattan. You have to look *under* the dunes, a hundred feet down. And then you will see the cities. Cities *drowned by sandstorms*, not by water."

He reached into his case and pulled out another rabbit: the images taken by the Shuttle Imaging Radar experiments. He slapped them onto the table, and turned to Will Reynolds. "Doctor Reynolds, if you would be kind enough to explain how these images are interpreted . . . "

Reynolds coughed, genuinely uncomfortable at explaining his work to a group of laymen. "Well—uh—see, this is a strip taken by a synthetic aperture radar, the Shuttle Imaging Radar, on board the Shuttle Orbiter." He worked his hands together and cracked the knobby finger joints. Will Reynolds was a stork of a man, with a long neck, great ungainly limbs and a mop of black hair. "It's sort of like a photograph, but it uses much longer wavelengths, microwaves rather than visible light. Centimeters, rather than micrometers. So it doesn't just see what's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on the surface. Where the ground is dry, it sees *under* the surface, too. And in a real desert, where there's been no rain for years or decades, it can see a long way down. Tens of meters. Here's some earlier SEASAT and SIR-A shots of the Sahara Desert, where it hasn't rained and you can clearly see the old river courses, far below the surface sand dunes . . . "

His hesitancy disappeared as he slipped into his special subject, and he was off and running.

Gerald Sebastian did not interrupt. He would not dream of interrupting. It was pure flummery, the oldest and best con-man style, with the right amount of technical and authentic detail to make it persuasive. Will Reynolds could not be bought, that was obvious. But he could be *sold*, and Sebastian had sold him on the project. Now he was showing the radar images of the Takla Makan, pointing out what seemed to be regular geometric figures under the sand dunes, where no such figures could be expected.

Those shapes looked like the natural cracking patterns of drying clay to me, but no one around the table suggested that. What do investment bankers, art museum patrons, and the rest of the New York *glitterati* know about clay cracks? And what do they care, when it's only half a million dollars at stake, and you might be part of the team that finds Atlantis? Nothing could beat that as cocktail party conversation. Sebastian knew his pigeons.

Very well; but what was I doing, following Sebastian on his wild chase to the world's most bleak and barren desert? I was a professional, a fund-raiser and a treasure-hunter myself.

To understand that, you have to remember an old gold-miners' story. Two prospectors were out in the American West, late in the nineteenth century; they had looked for gold unsuccessfully for forty years. They had dug and panned and surveyed one particular valley from end to end, and found not an ounce of gold anywhere in it. Finally, they decided that there were better ways to get rich. They left the valley they had explored so carefully and so unproductively, and headed for the nearest big town. There they put every cent they had into buying provisions, horses, and wagons, and they both set up stores.

Then they started spreading the story: the world's biggest gold find had just been made, back in the valley they had come from. If you went for a stroll there, you would stumble over fist-sized nuggets of twenty-four carat.

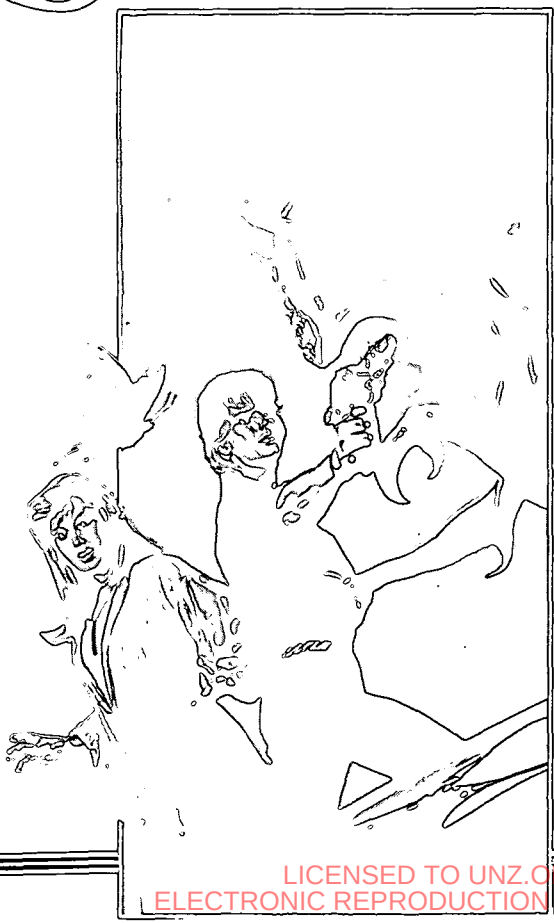
The run on horses, wagons, and supplies was incredible. Everybody in town wanted to dash off to the wilderness and stake a claim. The two old prospectors had cornered the market for transportation and supplies, and they could name their price. They sold, and sold, and sold, until at last

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JACK VANCE

ARAMINTA STATION

Book One of
The Cadwal Chronicles



The planet known as Cadwal has, for centuries, been the home of two sharply divided societies—the inbred human scientific station at Araminta, and the alien city on Lutween Atoll, which considers Cadwal their own. The alien Yips seek to break the charter by which Cadwal is governed and to spread their culture across the planet. But young Glawen Clattuc, declared "excess personnel" by his clan and now a member of the Cadwal police force, may have alternate plans.

"You can't possibly pass up any book by Jack Vance...He has perfected the trick of creating new worlds so deceptively real that after a while your own home seems imaginary."
—Jerry Pournelle

"Jack Vance is one of the finest writers that the science fiction field has ever known."
—Poul Anderson

A Tor hardcover
0-312-93044-5 ★ 540 pages
$19.95

TOR

Tor hardcovers are nationally distributed by St. Martin's Press

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one of them found he had only one horse and one wagon left. He jumped into the wagon, whipped up the horse, and started to drive out of town. As he did so, he found he was running side by side with his old friend, also with horse and wagon.

"Where you heading?"

"Back to the valley—to get the gold!"

"Yeah!"

So I was along on Sebastian's ride. And I was sure that the same ghosts of golden discovery must fill and dominate the fine, phantasmagoric mind of Gerald Sebastian. He and I were cut from the same bolt of cloth. As the poet laureate of all confidence tricksters and treasure-seekers puts it, we were "given to strong delusion, wholly believing a lie."

In my own defense, let me point out that the full insanity of the enterprise was not obvious at once. It became apparent to me only when we assembled in Hong Kong, prior to flying to Pakistan.

There, in the Regent Hotel in Kowloon, looking out over Hong Kong Harbor with its crowded water traffic, I tried to buy Jackie Sands a drink. A dry martini, perhaps, which is what I was having. Paddy Elphinstone, our China expert, had warned me that it would be my last chance at a decent alcoholic cocktail for quite a while.

Jackie smiled and ordered an orange juice. It was predictable. She was dark-haired, clear-skinned, and somewhere between thirty-eight and forty-four. Her hair stood out in a black cloud around her head, her eyes were bright, and she was so healthy-looking it was disgusting. She seemed to glow. If she had ever tried alcohol, it must have been as a long-ago experiment.

"Gerald is entitled to his opinion," she was saying. "But I have my own. I didn't come here expecting to find Atlantis. And I'm sure we won't find Atlantis."

"Then what will we find?" I asked the question, but young Paddy Elphinstone seemed even more interested in the answer. He had been drinking before we arrived, then accepted the drink that Jackie refused and quadrupled it. As the waiters went by, he gabbled at them in their own tongues, Tamil and Malay and Thai and Mandarin and Cantonese. Now he was leaning forward, his chin low down toward the table top, staring at Jackie.

"Visitors," she said. "Old visitors."

Paddy laughed. "Plenty of those, to the Takla Makan. Marco Polo wandered through there, and the Great Silk Road ran north and south of it. The technology for horizontal well drilling in Turpan was imported all the way from Persia."

"I mean older than that. And farther away than that." Jackie reached out and put a carefully manicured, red-nailed hand on Paddy's. Wasn't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she the woman I had imagined for twenty years, wandering the world at my side, the competent, level-headed companion that I had never managed to attract?

Her next words destroyed the fancy. "Visitors," she said. "Long, long ago. Aliens, from other stars. Beings who found the desert like home to them. They came, and then they left."

"Pretty neat trick," said Paddy. He was leaning back now, too drunk to pretend to sobriety. "Sure that they left, are you? Damn neat trick, if they did. D'yer know what Takla Makan means, in the local Turkic?"

I was sure that Jackie didn't. I didn't, either. I knew that Paddy had that incredible gift for languages, learning them as easily and idiomatically as a baby learns to talk. But I didn't know until that moment that Paddy Elphinstone was also an alcoholic.

"Takla Makan," he said again, and closed his eyes. His thin, straw-colored hair sagged in a cowlick over a pale forehead. "*Takla Makan* means this, Jackie Sands: 'Go in, and you don't come out.' "

At its western edge China meets three other countries: the Soviet Union to the north, Pakistan to the south, and a thin strip of Afghanistan between. That east-stretching tongue of Afghanistan would provide the easiest travel route, but it and the Soviet Union are both politically impossible. With no real choice, and a need for secrecy above all, Gerald Sebastian had arranged that we would move into China through Pakistan.

We drove from Rawalpindi to Gilgit, skirting the heights of the Karakoram Range. At Gilgit we made our final refueling stop, six hundred gallons for the trucks' enlarged tanks. Then we took the old path into Xinjiang, just as though we were heading for Kashi, on the western edge of the Takla Makan desert. Five miles short of the Chinese border we left the road and veered right.

I probably took more notice of our path than the others, because I was driving the first truck with Will Reynolds as companion and navigator. He was following our progress carefully, tousled dark head bent over maps and a terminal that hooked him into the Global Positioning System satellites. He called the turns to me for more than seven hours. Then, as the sun of early May began to set and the first sand dunes came into sight to the northeast, he nodded and folded the map.

"We're two hundred miles from the border, and we ought to be out of the danger area for patrols. Sebastian said he wants to stop early tonight. Keep your eyes open for a little lake ahead; we're going to stay by it."

I nodded, while Will put the map away and pulled out one of his precious radar images. Every spare moment went into them. Now he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was trying to pinpoint our position on the picture and muttering to himself about "layover" location problems.

The lake, thirty yards across and fed by a thin trickle in a bed of white gravel, appeared in less than a mile. While the other truck caught up with us, I hopped out and bent down by the soda-crusted lakeside. The water was shallow, briny, and heavy with bitter alkalines.

I spat it out. "Undrinkable," I said to Sebastian, as he moved to join me.

He didn't argue, didn't want to taste it for himself to make sure. He knew why he had hired me, and he trusted his own judgment. "I'll get the desalinization unit," he said. "Tell the others. A gallon per person, to do what you like with."

"Washing?"

He gave me a remote smile and gestured at the pool's still surface.

Dinner—my job and Paddy's, we were the hired help—took another hour, cooking with the same diesel fuel that ran the motors and would power the hoist derrick. By the time we were finished eating, the first stars were showing. Fifteen minutes later the tents were inflated and moored. The trucks, packed with supplies and equipment, were emergency accommodation only.

We sat on tiny camp stools arranged in a circle on the rocky ground. Not around the romantic fire of Sebastian's movies—the nearest tree was probably three hundred miles away—but around a shielded oil lamp, hanging on a light tripod. Gerald Sebastian was in an ebullient mood. He had wandered around the camp, putting everything that appealed to his eye onto videotape, and now he was ready to relax. He was a rarity among explorers, one who did all his own camerawork and final program composition. He would add his commentaries back in America.

"The hard part?" he said, in answer to a question from Jackie. "Love, we're done with the hard part. We know where we're going, we know what we'll find there, we're all equipped to get it."

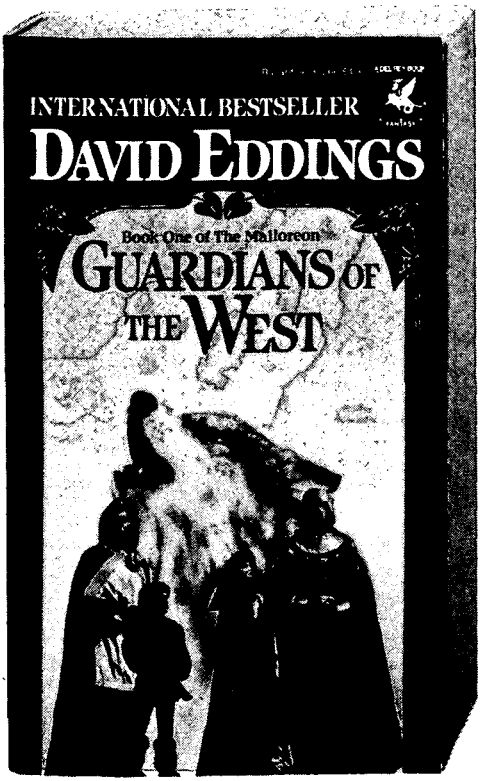
"What is it, d'you think?" said Paddy in a blurry voice. His words to me in Hong Kong concerning access to alcoholic drinks in China applied, I now realized, only to others. Paddy had brought along his own bottled supply, and from the way he was acting it had to be a generous one.

Instead of replying, Sebastian stood up and walked off to the trucks. He was back in a couple of minutes carrying a big yellow envelope. Without a word he slipped out half a dozen photo prints and passed them around the group. I felt the excitement goosepimpling the hair on my forearms. Sebastian had shown me pictures when we first talked, and I gathered he had shown others to Jackie Sands and Will Reynolds. But like a showman shining the spotlight on a different part of the stage for each different audience, he showed each set of listeners what it wanted

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Finally in paperback—
The *New York Times* bestseller that continues *The Belgariad!*

"FANTASY ON THE GRAND SCALE... LAVISH AND EXUBERANT...AN ABSORBING STORY!"
—Chicago Sun-Times



On Sale in March
$4.95

DEL REY
#1 in Science Fiction and Fantasy
Published by Ballantine Books

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to hear—and only that. I had asked a dozen times for more details, and always he had said, "Soon enough you'll see—when we get to Xinjiang." I had no doubt that even now there was another folder somewhere, one that none of us would see.

Back in the United States, Sebastian had produced for me only two photographs, of a ruby ring set in thick gold, and of a flat golden tablet the length of a man's hand, inscribed with unfamiliar ideographs. I couldn't relate either of those to Atlantis, but of course I didn't care. Atlantis was somebody else's part of the elephant.

The picture in my left hand was not one I had seen before. It was clear, with excellent detail and color balance, good enough to be used on one of Gerald Sebastian's TV documentaries. Some day it might be. For I was staring at a green statue, with a meter ruler propped alongside to show the scale, and although in fourteen years of wasted wandering I had seen the artifacts of every civilization on Earth, this, whatever it might be, was unlike any of them.

It was man-sized, and must have weighed a quarter of a ton. The plumed helmet and tunic might be Greek or Cretan, the sandals Roman. The face had the Egyptian styling, while the sword on the heavy buckled belt was vaguely central Asian. And if I stretched my imagination, I could see in the composed attitude of the limbs the influence of Indonesia and of Buddhism. Put the pieces together, and the sum was totally strange.

Strange, but not enough to excite me. The picture in my right hand did that. It was an enlargement of the statue's ornate belt. The buckle looked like the front of a modern hand calculator, with miniature numerals, function keys, and display screen. Next to it, attached to the belt but ready to be detached from it, was a bulbous weapon with sights, trigger, and a flared barrel. It was not a revolver, but it looked a lot like a power laser.

First things first. "Do you have the statue?" I asked, before anyone else could speak.

He had assumed his old seat in the circle. "If I did, I would not be here." He was sitting as immobile as a statue himself. "And if I thought I could obtain it alone, none of you would be here. Let me tell you a story. It concerns my earlier trip into the Takla Makan, and how I came to make it."

The lamp caught the keen profile and the dreamer's brow. The moon was rising. Far away to the northeast, the first desert dunes were a smoky blur on the horizon.

"I thought I knew it all," he said. "And then, three years ago, I was called in to help the executor of an estate in Dresden. Dull stuff, I thought, but an old friend called in a favor. You may ask, as I did, why me? It

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

turned out that the old lady who died was a relative of Sir Aurel Stein, and she mentioned my name in her will." Paddy Elphinstone started, and Sebastian caught the movement. "That's right, Paddy, there's only one of him." He turned to the rest of us. "Aurel Stein was the greatest Oriental explorer of his time. And this was his stamping-ground"—he gestured around us—"for forty years, in the early part of this century. He covered China, Mongolia, and Xinjiang—Sinkiang, the maps called it in his day—like nobody else in the world. He lived in India and he died in Kabul, but he left relatives in Germany. It was more than a pleasure to look at that house in Dresden. It was an *honor*.

"Before I'd been in that place for an hour, I knew something unusual had been thrown my way. But it was a couple more days before I realized how exciting it was." He tapped the photographs on his knee. "Stein drew the statue, and described its dimensions. The pen-and-ink drawing was in the old lady's collection. Sir Aurel told in his journal exactly where he had found it, in a dry valley surrounded by dunes. He gave the location—or to be more accurate, he described how to reach the spot from Urumqi and the Turpan Depression. He knew it was an oddity and he couldn't identify its maker, but it was far too heavy to carry. Sixty years ago, that statue's belt didn't send its own message. Electronic calculators and power lasers didn't exist. So he left it there. He was content with the drawing, and he didn't set any great value on that. It could take an inconspicuous place in his works, and end up in the possession of an old German lady, dying in her late eighties in a Dresden rowhouse."

It was hard to be specific, but there was something different about Gerald Sebastian. I felt an openness, an eagerness in him since he had entered China, something that was quite different from his usual public persona. Evaluating his performance now, I decided that he was a little too obsessive to appeal to his own backers. He and Will Reynolds were brothers under the skin.

"I went there," he said. "Three hundred miles south of Urumqi, just as Sir Aurel Stein said, to the middle of the worst part of the desert. Of course, I didn't *expect* to find the statue. Chances were, if it were ever there, it was long gone. I knew that, so I went inadequately prepared and I didn't think through what I would do if I found it. But I had to look. Sam will understand that, even if the rest of you don't." He nodded his head at me, eyes unreadable in the lamplight. "Well, the valley was there, half filled with drifting sand. And I didn't have equipment with me. I spent one week digging—scrabbling, that's a better word—then I was running short of water." He slipped the photographs back into their envelope and stood up abruptly. "The statue was there. I found it on my last day. There was a gold tablet and a ruby ring, attached to the belt, and I took those. Then I photographed it, and I covered it with sand. It

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

will be there still. We're going to lift it out this time and put it on the truck. And when we get it, we'll take it back for radioactive dating. My guess is that it is more than seven thousand years old."

He walked away, outside the circle of lamplight, over behind the two balloon-wheeled trucks. After a few seconds Jackie Sands followed him. Paddy was off in an alcoholic world of his own, eyes closed and mouth open. I looked at Will Reynolds, sitting hunched forward and tugging at his finger joints.

"Give me a hand to get Paddy to his tent, would you? It's getting cold, and I don't think he'll manage it on his own."

Will nodded and moved to the other side of Paddy. "I've seen it, you know," he said, as we lifted, one to each arm.

I paused. "The statue?"

"Naw." He gave a snuffling laugh. "How the hell would I see the statue? The *valley*. It shows on the radar images, clear as day. And there's structure underneath it—buildings, a whole town, buried deep in the sand. I saw 'em, before I'd ever met Gerald Sebastian."

"He contacted you?"

"No. I wrote to him. You see, after I interpreted the images and realized what I might be seeing, I asked the applications office at Headquarters for field trip funding, to collect some ground truth. And they *bounced* it—as though it was some dumb boondoggle to get me a trip to China!" Between us, we stuffed Paddy Elphinstone into his tent and zipped the flap. If he wanted to undress that was his own affair. "That made me so mad," said Will, "I thought, damn you bureaucrats. If you don't want this, there's others might. I'd seen one of Sebastian's travel programs about China, and I wrote to him. The hell with NASA! We'll find that city without 'em."

Will turned and lurched off toward his own tent. He had the height of a basketball player and none of the coordination.

Well, I thought, that's another piece of the elephant accounted for. So far as Will Reynolds was concerned, this illegal journey to China's western desert was just a field trip, a way to gather the data that justified his own interpretation of satellite images. I wondered, had Gerald Sebastian talked of Sir Aurel Stein's legacy in Dresden, and the follow-up trip to the Takla Makan desert *before* Will Reynolds had shown him those radar images? My skeptical soul assured me that he had not.

And yet I couldn't quite accept my own logic. While Sebastian had been speaking about Aurel Stein, a disquieting thought had been creeping up on me. From the day I was recruited by him, I had been sure that he and I had the same motives. Sure, he was smoother than I was, but inside we were the same. Now I wasn't sure. He was so terribly convincing, so filled with burning curiosity. Either his interest in exploration

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Funnier than the Bible."
—the editor

"I liked it better than *War and Peace.*"
—the author's mother

"Doug Adams, eat your heart out."
—the author's father

If you like *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy...*

Then you'll flip for...

THE LIGHT FANTASTIC
By TERRY PRATCHETT

In Discworld, magic is commonplace, luggage walks upon tiny feet, dragons soar the skies, and you really *can* fall off the edge of the world. Rincewind, a bumbling and cowardly wizard, wanders too close to the world's rim and finds himself teetering. Far from being the end of his adventures, the real excitement has just begun as Rincewind, the most unlikely savior you'll ever meet, has to work the One Great Spell if Discworld is to be saved from impending doom.

"Pratchett is the Douglas Adams of fantasy."
—*Knave*

$3.50

SIGNET FANTASY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was powerful and genuine—or he was better at the bait-and-catch funding game than anyone in history. Was it somehow possible that *both* were true?

I lit a black Poona cheroot and stood there in the lamplit circle, noticing the temperature dropping fast around me. In this area, it would be well below freezing before dawn, and then back up to a hundred degrees by the next afternoon. I zipped up my jacket and started to put away the cooking equipment. With Paddy gone for the night, the number of hired help on the party was down to one.

The evening was not yet over. Before I had time to finish tidying up, Jackie Sands reappeared from the direction of the trucks. She was wearing a fluffy wool sweater, as dark, tangled, and luxuriant as her hair. She made no attempt to help—I wondered if she had ever in her whole life cleared up after dinner—but sat down on one of the camp stools.

"Destroying your lungs," she said.

"Do you tell that to your hubby, too?"

There was a flash of teeth, but I couldn't see her facial expression. "It's not worth telling things to Henry. He stopped accepting inputs years ago on everything except stocks and bonds."

"Does he smoke?"

"Not any more. Doctor's orders."

"So he *does* accept other inputs."

This time a chuckle accompanied the gleam of teeth. "I suppose he does. But not from me."

I flicked the cigar stub away and watched its orange-red spark cartwheel across the dusty surface. "That's one nice thing about deserts. No fire hazard." I sat down on a camp stool opposite her. "What can I do for you, Mrs. Hoffman?"

"Miss Sands. I don't use my husband's name. Do you have to be so direct?"

"It's nearly ten-thirty."

"That's not late."

"Not for Manhattan. But social functions end early in the Takla Makan. I have to be up at five. And it's getting cold."

"It is." She snuggled deeper into her sweater. "I thought this was supposed to be a hot desert. All right, straight to business. I know why Gerald Sebastian organized this expedition. He did it for fame and fortune, equal parts. I know why Will Reynolds came along; he wants to protect his scientific reputation. And I understand Paddy. He's a born explorer, along for the sheer love of it, and if he doesn't drink himself to death he'll be world famous before he's forty. But what about you, Sam? You sit and listen to everybody else, and you hardly say a word. What's your motive for being here?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Why do you want to know? And if it comes to that, what's your motive?"

"Mm. You show me yours and I'll show you mine, eh?" She stared straight into the lamp and pursed her lips. "You know, being on an expedition like this is a bit like being on a small cruise ship. After a few days, you start to tell near-strangers things you wouldn't admit to your family."

"I don't have a family."

"No?" Her eyebrows arched. "All right then, I'll do it. I'll play your game. A swap. Who first?"

"You."

"You're a hard man, Sam-I-Am. Lordie. Where should I begin? Do you know what SETI is?"

"Settee? Like couch?"

"No. SETI, like S-E-T-I—the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence. Heard of it?"

"No. I'm still looking for signs of intelligence on Earth. What is it, some sort of game?"

"Not to me. Just think what it will mean if we ever find evidence that there are other intelligent beings in the universe. It will change everything we do. Change the basic way we think, maybe stop us all blowing ourselves up. I believe the work is enormously important, and for nearly five years I've been giving money to promote SETI research."

"Henry's money?"

She sat up a little straighter. "My allowance. But most of the research work is highly technical, with radio receivers and electronics and signal analysis. I can't even understand how my money is spent."

"Which makes it sound like a classic rip-off."

"It does sound like that, I admit. But it's not."

Her voice was totally earnest. Unfortunately, that's one prime qualification to be a total sucker. "You *think* it's not," I said.

"Put it that way if you want to. I've never regretted giving the money. But then I heard about this expedition, and it really made me think. Sebastian says he has found Atlantis, with a technological civilization as advanced as ours. But I say, it's just as likely he found evidence of *visitors* to the earth, ones who came long ago."

"And just happened to look exactly like humans? That's too implausible."

"Not if they were truly advanced. Beings like that would be able to look just as they wanted to look. Anyway, Sam, you're on the wrong side of the argument. Suppose there's only a one-in-a-thousand chance that what we are looking for is evidence of aliens. I'm still better off spending

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

my money coming here, to do something myself, rather than being a little bit of something I don't even understand. Don't you agree?"

"Oddly enough, I do. It's one of the golden rules: stay close to the place your money is spent."

"But you don't accept the idea of visitors to this planet?"

"I don't reject it. I just say it's improbable."

"Right. But it's possible." She sounded short of breath. "And that's what I think, too. So that's me, and that's why I'm here, and the only reason I'm here. Now how about you?"

I didn't want to talk, but now I seemed committed to it. I lit another cigar and blew smoke toward the half-moon. "I'm going to be a big disappointment to you," I said, with my face averted. "You're on an expedition with a world-famous traveler and television celebrity, a NASA scientist, and a born explorer. I'm the bad apple in the barrel. You see, I'm a treasure hunter. I came with Gerald Sebastian for one simple reason: there's a chance—an outside chance, but a hell of a lot better than the odds that you'll find your extraterrestrials—that I'm going to walk away from this holding a whole basket of money. That's why I'm here."

"I don't believe you!"

I shrugged. "I knew you wouldn't. I didn't think you'd like it, and you don't. But it's true."

"You may have convinced yourself that it's true, but it isn't." She sounded outraged. "My God, if all you wanted was money, there are a hundred easier ways to get it. Play the stock market, work in a casino, go into the insurance business. You don't have to come to the ends of the earth to make money. I don't think you know your own motivation, or you want to hide it from me."

I threw away my second cigar—this one much less than half-smoked. "Miss Sands, how long have you been married?"

"Why, four years, I suppose. Five years in August. Not that I see why—"

"Do you love Henry Hoffman?"

"What! I—of course I do. I *do*. And it's no damned business of yours."

"But you left him for months to come on this expedition."

"I told you why!"

"Right. Do you enjoy sleeping with him? Never mind, ignore that, and let's assume you do. You're quite right, it *is* no business of mine. All I'm trying to say is that people do a lot of different things to make money, and it's no one else's concern *why* they do it. And sometimes the obvious assumptions about why people do things are right, and sometimes they are quite wrong. So why won't you believe me, when I tell you that I'm here for the simplest possible reason, to make my fortune?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Awful Green Things from Outer Space™

Now, Steve Jackson Games brings back one of the *strangest,* and most entertaining, sci-fi games of all time — in a bright green Pocket Box!

The Awful Green Things from Outer Space is a game of alien invasion. The exploration ship *Znutar* is attacked by monsters . . . and suddenly its crew are fighting for their lives.

One player takes the part of the Awful Green Things, trying to eat the crew and take over the ship. The other player controls the ship's crew, desperately trying one weapon after another to find the one that will work.

The Awful Green Things have invaded your local hobby store. Or, if you can't find them there, send $7.50 (includes shipping/handling) to order by mail. Texas residents add 60¢ sales tax. Send a long SASE for a free catalog.

STEVE JACKSON GAMES
Box 18957-J Austin, TX 78760

The Awful Green Things from Outer Space and *Pocket Box* are trademarks of Steve Jackson Games Incorporated.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But she was on her feet, swiveling around and heading fast for the dark bulk of the trucks. "Damn you," she said as she walked away. "My marriage is fine, and anyway it's none of your bloody business. Keep your big nose out of it."

She was gone, leaving me still with the clearing-up to take care of. Before I did that I picked up the lamp and went off to look for the cigar I had thrown away. The way things were going, before the end of this expedition I might be craving a half-smoked cigar.

I slept poorly and woke at dawn. When I emerged from my tent Paddy already had the stove going and water heated for coffee. Apparently he was one of those unfortunates who never suffer a hangover, which made his long-term prospects for full alcoholism all too good. One good hangover will keep me sober for months. He nodded at me cheerfully while he shaved. "Sleep well?"

"Lousy. I thought I could hear noises outside the tent—like people talking. I guess I was dreaming."

"No. You were listening to *them*." Paddy pointed his razor at the sand dunes to the north. "It's called *mingsha*—singing sand. It will get worse when we move deeper into the Takla Makan."

"I'm not talking about sand dunes, Paddy. I'm talking about *people*. Conversations, whistling, calling to animals. I even heard somebody playing the flute."

"That's right." He was intolerably perky for the early morning. "Hold on a minute." He put his razor down on the little folding table that held his coffee, towel, soap, and a cheese sandwich, and ran off to dive into his tent. A second later he reappeared with a paperback book in his hand.

"We're not the first people to visit this place, not by a long shot. It was a big obstacle for two thousand years on the Great Silk Road, and all the travelers skirted it either north or south. Marco Polo came by the Takla Makan seven hundred years ago, when he was traveling around on Kubla Khan's business. He called it the Desert of Lop. Here's what he says about the desert."

While I poured sweetened black coffee for myself, Paddy found his place in the book and began to read aloud. " 'In this tract neither beasts nor birds are met with, because there is no kind of food for them. It is asserted as a well-known fact that this desert is the abode of many evil spirits, which lure travelers to their destruction with extraordinary illusions . . . they unexpectedly hear themselves called by their own names, and in a tone of voice to which they are accustomed. Supposing the call to proceed from their companions, they are led away from the direct road and left to perish. At night, they seem to hear the march of a large cavalcade.' And here's another choice bit. 'The spirits of the desert

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are said at times to fill the air with the sounds of all kinds of musical instruments'—there's your flute, Sam— 'and also of drums and the clash of arms.' And it wasn't only Marco Polo. A Chinese monk, Fa Xian, passed this way in the fifth century, and he wrote that there were 'evil spirits and hot winds that kill every man who encounters them, and as far as the eye can see no road is visible, only the skeletons of those who have perished serve to mark the way.' "

Paddy closed his book and grinned happily. "Good stuff, eh? And nothing has changed. At least we know what we're in for over the next few weeks." He went to put the book back in his tent.

The dust-red sun was well above the horizon now, and the other three team members emerged from their tents within a couple of minutes of each other. Between cooking breakfast and striking camp, Paddy and I had no more chance for talk.

Gerald filmed our activities and the scenery around us, then disappeared into the second truck. But Jackie Sands gave me an extra nice smile and even helped collect the breakfast plates. Whatever had annoyed her so last night was apparently all forgotten or forgiven.

She had discarded yesterday's shirt and jeans in favor of a long, loose-fitting dress of white cotton and thick-soled leather sandals. The clothes made good hot-weather sense. So did the different hair styling, smoothing the viper's nest of tangles to long dark curls. But she had also applied heavy makeup and bright lipstick, and that was not so smart. I wondered if she would keep it up when we melted in the heart of the desert and the trucks' inside temperature soared over a hundred and ten.

And then I noticed the dark rings under her eyes, which makeup could not quite hide. Like me, Jackie had apparently suffered a disturbed night.

We were on our way by six. We planned to drive only in the early morning and late afternoon, resting through the worst heat of midday. Today we would be penetrating the true dune country of the desert. I thought that in spite of Gerald Sebastian's optimism, the tough part of the expedition was just beginning.

We drove almost due north, while the land ahead turned to rolling sand hills, enormous, lifeless, seemingly endless. Dun-colored, distinct, and sun-shadowed, each dune rose five or six hundred feet above the dead plain. By nine o'clock their profiles smoked and shimmered in dust and heat haze. It was easy to see why travelers regarded this desert as featureless and impassable. The dunes moved constantly, shaped by wind, creeping across the arid landscape. Nothing could grow here, nothing provided permanence.

And Will Reynolds, seated at my side, was in his element. His space images revealed the contour of every dune. He had known, before he left Washington, their extent, their shape, and their steepness. Months ago

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he had sat at his desk and plotted an optimum route, weaving us north to Gerald Sebastian's destination on an efficient and sinuous path that took advantage of every break in the dune pattern.

Now he was finally able to apply his knowledge. As I drove, and the thermometer above the truck's dashboard climbed implacably through the nineties, Will chuckled to himself and called out compass headings. At a steady twenty-five miles an hour, we snaked our way forward without a hitch.

Other than an occasional tamarisk bush, we saw nothing and no one. A billion Chinese people lived far to the east, on the alluvial plains and along the fertile river valleys, but no one lived here. This land made Tibet's high plateau appear lush and fertile, even to China's central development committee. According to Gerald Sebastian, the danger of our discovery was too small to worry about.

By ten-thirty, there was no scrap of shade from even the steepest of the dunes. We halted, raised the parasol over both trucks, and settled down to wait. That gave me my first chance to talk to Sebastian alone since we had stopped for dinner last night.

I followed him as he prowled outside the shady zone with his video camera. He spoke with his eye still to the viewfinder. "All right, Sam. Say it."

"You're the one who has to say it."

He turned to face me, squinting up at me in the strong sun. "I don't understand. What do you want?"

"An explanation." We automatically walked on up the dune, farther out of earshot of the others. The heat of the sand burned through our shoes. "Last night, you told us all that you took the ruby ring and the gold tablet from the statue on your last trip."

"Quite right, I said that. And it's quite true."

"So why didn't Sir Aurel Stein do the same thing, when *he* found and drew a picture of the statue?"

He looked me in the eye, the honest stare that was part of his stock-in-trade. "I don't know, Sam. All I can tell you is that he didn't take them. Naturally, I asked myself the same question."

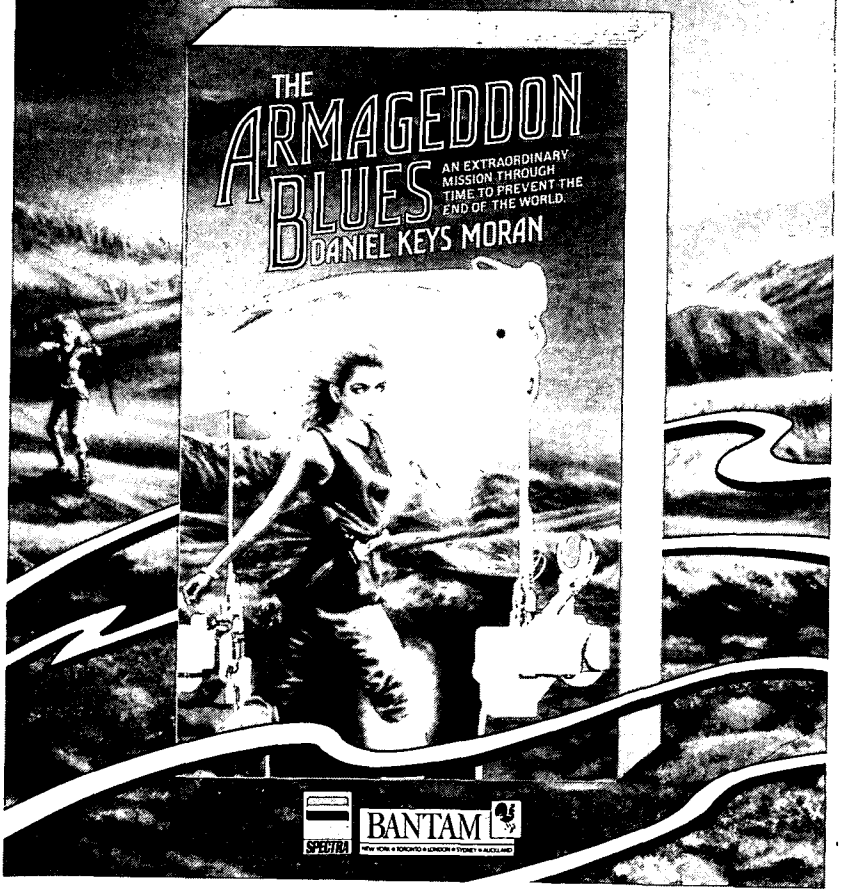
"And how did you answer it?"

"First, I thought that maybe he planned to return for the statue itself, and so he left everything else behind, too. Then when Xinjiang was closed to foreigners, in 1930, he couldn't go back. It's a weak argument, I know, because we all carry what we can, and only leave behind what we can't haul with us. My second explanation is not much better. Aurel Stein didn't show the tablet and ring in his drawing; therefore, they were not there when he explored the valley. Someone else was there between his visit and mine. I'm sure you see what's wrong with that idea."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

From seven hundred years in the future
and two hundred years in the past
a man and a woman meet on a California highway
to change the present
and save the future.

"Vivid, startling, unnerving in its implications."
—Jeffrey A. Carver



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"People take things from archeological sites. They don't leave them there."

"Exactly!" There was a furious, frenzied energy to Gerald Sebastian now, an effervescence that had not been there before we reached the Takla Makan. But he was not worried, only excited. "So what is the explanation? Sam, that's what we're going to find out. And this time, we didn't come lacking equipment."

He was not referring to the pulleys, hoist, and derrick on the truck. So what was it? I knew the complete inventory of the truck I was driving. Maybe Paddy Elphinstone could tell me about the other one.

"Don't worry, Sam," Sebastian was saying. "If I knew what had happened, I would have told you." He was interrupted by a cry from the camp. Jackie Sands was standing out from under the parasol, calling and waving her arms at us. We ran back to her.

"It's Will Reynolds," she said as soon as we were close enough. "He was sitting next to me, and suddenly he started to speak. He sounded all slurred, as though he was drunk. Then he tried to stand up and fell off his chair. I think he had a stroke. He's unconscious."

He wasn't, not quite. When we got to him his eyes were rolling from side to side under half-open lids and he was muttering to himself. I sniffed his breath, felt his pulse, then touched my fingers to his forehead.

"Not a stroke. And not drunk. He's overheated—get his shirt open and bring some water. Where the devil is Paddy?"

Before I had an answer to that question, Will Reynolds was sitting up and looking about him. We had damp cloths on his wrists, temples, and throat.

"What happened?" he said.

"What do you remember?" I wanted to be sure that he was functioning normally.

"Over there." He pointed up at the brow of a dune, into the eye of the sun. "I saw them marching over the top of it and I stood up to shout to you and Gerald. Then I woke up here."

"Saw who?" said Jackie. She looked at me. "I was sitting there, and I didn't see a thing."

"The patrol, or whatever it was. A line of men and pack-horses and camels, one after another, parading across the top of the dune. There must have been fifty of them." He turned to Gerald. "That's one idea of yours out of the window. You said there was a negligible chance that we'd have trouble with Chinese patrols, and we run into one the first day. I guess they didn't see us down here." He tried to stand, then swayed and leaned back against me. "What's happened to me?"

"Just rest there," I said. "You're all right, Will. You've got a slight

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

case of heatstroke. Take it easy today, and tomorrow you'll be back to normal."

The nature of his overheated fancy worried me. Had he, half-asleep, somehow overheard Paddy reading to me this morning, and built the idea of desert caravans into his subconscious? Now Paddy himself was returning from almost the direction that Will had pointed, shuffling along between two dunes and wearing a coolie hat that covered his head and shielded his shoulders. His walk told me that he was not sober.

"Where have you been?" Sebastian's voice was more than excited. It was demented.

Paddy's face had a blurry, unfocused look. "I thought I saw something." He made a vague gesture behind him. "Out there, between the dunes. Some*body*," he corrected, with the precision of the drunkard.

Add that to Will Reynolds' statement, and you had something to catch Sebastian's full attention.

"Who was it?"

Paddy shook his head, but before the gesture was complete Sebastian was running off between the dunes, following the weaving line of Paddy's footsteps. Then he went scrambling up the steepest slope of the nearest mountain of sand. Three minutes later he was back, slithering down amid a great cloud of dust.

"Of all the bloody bad luck!" When he got too agitated his upper-class accent began to fall apart. "One patrol per thousand square miles, and we run smack into it."

"You saw it?" I asked.

"I saw their dust, and that was enough." He ran to the camp and began to throw things anyhow into the trucks. "Come on, we're getting out of here. If we head north we can run clear of them."

I folded down the parasol. "What about Reynolds? He's not fit to navigate."

"He can travel in the second truck." Sebastian hesitated for a moment, staring first at Paddy and then at Jackie. I could read his thoughts. Who was going to drive that one, if he navigated for me?

"Will Reynolds has the track through the dunes clearly marked on his radar images," I said. "I'm pretty sure Miss Sands could call the turns for me."

"Do it." The trucks were loaded, and already he was hustling dazed Will and drunk Paddy into the second one. "And don't stop unless you need to consult with us. We'll be right behind you."

I swung up into the driver's seat and put my hand on the dashboard. We were in the hottest part of the afternoon. The grey exposed metal would blister skin. As Jackie moved to the seat beside me, and muttered

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her protest at the heat of the leather, I leaned out again. "What time do you want to make camp?" I called to Sebastian. "Sunset?"

"No. There should be a decent moon tonight. Keep going as long as you can see and stay awake." The engine behind me started, growling into low gear. His voice rang out above it. "There may be other patrols. We have to reach that valley—*soon*."

For the first hour it was the silence of people with too much to say. Jackie kept her head down, pored over the images, and called off the turns clearly and correctly. I stared at the land ahead, drove, sweated, and wondered why I had such a terrible headache.

"Will you do me a disgusting favor?" I asked at last.

"What? While you're driving?"

"Dig down into the knapsack behind you, and give me a cigar."

"Yuck."

When she reached out to put the lit cheroot in my mouth I turned to nod my thanks. She had wiped the makeup off her face with paper towels, and patches of sweat discolored the armpits and back of her white cotton dress. The dress itself had become dust-grey. Trickles of perspiration were running down her brow and cheeks.

"It will start to cool off in about two hours," I said.

"Two more hours of this. God." While I was still looking at her, she reached up with both hands and pushed the mass of dark hair deliberately off her head.

"You wear a wig," I said brainlessly.

"No. I wear six of them. A look for all occasions. Or almost all." She sighed and ran her hands through her hair. "My God, that feels good."

Her hair was short, almost boyish, a light blond showing the first lines of grey. Without the wig her face had a different shape, and oddly enough she looked younger.

She stared back at me with only a trace of embarrassment. "Well, Sam-I-Am, there's the dreadful truth. Next comes the glass eye and the wooden leg."

"Slipping down the ladder rung by rung. Have a cigar."

"I've not come to that yet. But I'd sell my best friend for a glass of chilled orange juice." She laughed. "You know, it's hard on Will, but I'm glad that I'm not riding in that other truck. Paddy's sloshed all the time, and I think Gerald is going crazy."

Her cheerful manner didn't quite convince.

"You had a fight with Gerald," I said.

"Why do you say that?"

"Guessing. You were both too keen for you to ride with me. And you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FINANCIAL ADVICE NEVER LOOKED SO GOOD.

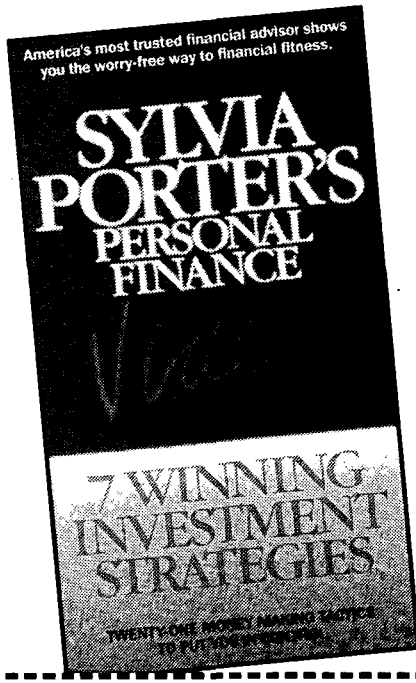
Even the best advice can sometimes be confusing. But with Sylvia Porter's Personal Finance Videos, powerful, moneymaking concepts come alive, forming simple, clear pictures in your mind.

In 7 WINNING INVESTMENT STRATEGIES, you see charts, graphs, and practical, everyday examples that show how you can profit from:

- home ownership
- real estate
- tax-advantaged investments
- when to buy or sell stocks
- higher income investments
- investing for growth and appreciation
- mutual funds

You'll discover sensible investments geared to your lifestyle, your family commitments, and your personal finance objectives. What's more, you'll see absolutely what *not* to do with your money.

So don't let another day pass. Use 7 WINNING INVESTMENT STRATEGIES to brighten your financial outlook.


America's most trusted financial advisor shows you the worry-free way to financial fitness.
SYLVIA PORTER'S PERSONAL FINANCE
7 WINNING INVESTMENT STRATEGIES

ONLY $29.95

CALL TOLL-FREE TODAY
1 (800) 453-9200
Or use coupon

©1988 J2 Communications

Make check/money order payable to J2 COMMUNICATIONS and send to:
SYLVIA PORTER VIDEO · P.O. Box 3169 · Ogden, UT 84409

Yes! Please send me _____ SYLVIA PORTER'S PERSONAL FINANCE VIDEO(s) for $29.95 each (plus $3.00 shipping/handling per tape).

☐ VHS ☐ Beta

Method of Payment: ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ Check/Money Order

CREDIT CARD # |_|_|_|_|_|_|_|_|_|_|_|_|_|_|_|_|

EXP. |_|_|_|_| SIGNATURE _____

Name (Please Print) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

IA

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

looked exhausted this morning. You had a fight with him last night, after you left me."

"No. After dinner, and before I sat with you by the lamp. I suppose that's why I came to you—I wanted to avoid more contact with him."

"Thanks."

"It worked. He didn't try to come to my tent. But I had a terrible night anyway. I'm normally a great sleeper. Head on pillow, and I'm gone. Only last night . . . "

With most people I'd have suggested a sleeping pill. Jackie would no doubt have given me a lecture on drug abuse.

"Horrible dreams!" she went on. "I got up feeling like a wet Kleenex."

"Me too. Did you hear things outside?"

"Yes!"

"People talking, and animals, and music?" I slowed the truck and stared at her.

She frowned back at me. "No. Nothing like that. I heard storm noises, and rushing water, and horrible sounds like buildings falling over. In fact, in the middle of the night I was so scared I opened my tent and looked out to see what was happening. I thought there must be flash floods or something. But everything outside was quiet. I decided I must have been asleep without knowing it. And yet I still couldn't sleep. What's happening, Sam? Is it all nerves?"

Before I would accept that, I'd believe something more mundane, like bad food or water. Or even—I couldn't stop the thought—deliberate drugging or poisoning. Gerald Sebastian controlled all the water supply from the distillation unit. *Was* it no more than alcohol with Paddy, and heat stroke with Will Reynolds?

"You said Gerald was going crazy. What did you mean by that, Jackie?"

And now she did seem embarrassed. Her eyes moved to stare at the truck's radiator emblem. "I wish I hadn't said that, even though it's true enough. I don't think you have a very good opinion of me. So it probably won't surprise you to find out that Gerald and I are lovers."

"Surprise, no. Upset, maybe."

A quick sideways flash of her eyes in my direction. "Thanks, Sam. That's kind when I'm not looking my best. You know, that's the first nice thing you've said to me. You pretend to be a human icicle, but you're not. I'm glad. But I want you to know that Gerald wasn't the reason I'm on this expedition. I'm serious about the SETI work, and I wanted to come here long before he and I started anything."

"I believe you. Henry doesn't know?"

"Know, or care. He's fascinated by Gerald, thinks he's brilliant."

"So do I. He is."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The Gerald Sebastian that I met in New York certainly was. He knew where he was going, how to get there, just what he wanted."

"Present company included?"

"I guess so. But once we reached Pakistan he changed completely. He's a monomaniac now. All day yesterday in the truck, while he drove, he talked and talked and talked."

"Of course he did. Jackie, this is his baby."

"You don't understand. He didn't talk about the expedition, the way he had in Hong Kong. Or rather he did, but not in a sensible way. He went on and on about *Atlantis*—about the rivers and lakes there, and the flower gardens, and fruit trees, and white sailboats moving along streets like Venetian canals. Sam, he was totally dippy. As though he thought he had been there himself, and knew just what it was like. I tried to tell him he had to get hold of himself, but it was useless. He couldn't stop. And Paddy was no help at all. He just sat there in the truck with a dreamy look on his face."

I remembered my discussion with Gerald Sebastian regarding Aurel Stein's failure to take the ring and gold tablet from the statue. He had seemed wildly excited, but as rational as you could ask. "I'm sorry, Jackie. I can't see Sebastian that way."

"Nor could I, three days back. Sam, he's your colleague and your boss. But Gerald and I were *lovers*, for heaven's sake. Less than a week ago we couldn't get enough of each other. But last night after dinner, when we went to his tent . . . "

I could complete that thought, and also the whole proposition. Gerald hadn't wanted to make love to Jackie; Jackie needed her self-esteem; therefore, something must be seriously wrong with Gerald.

"Oh, don't be an idiot, Sam." And I hadn't said a word. "It's not that he's tired of me, or got other things on his mind. Anyway, I wouldn't get bent out of shape about Gerald and sex. I'm telling you, he's gone *crazy*."

It was her inconsistency that convinced me. She had wanted Sebastian in her tent right after dinner, but later she wanted to avoid him altogether.

Perfect, I thought. I'm on an expedition with a crazy leader, a drunk interpreter, a brain-fried navigator, and a wild lady who thinks we will find little green men in the middle of the Takla Makan. Disaster on wheels.

And with all that to worry about, what thought poked its way again and again into my forebrain? Of course. It was Jackie's comment that I was a human icicle.

We had stopped talking. Maybe she thought I didn't believe a word she'd said, and was waiting for a chance to talk about her with Sebastian. Maybe she felt as exhausted as I did. My head was still aching, and I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

drove by instinct, following the route that Jackie gave me without thinking or caring where it led. The sun set, the moon came up, and we were able to cruise on without stopping. The temperature went from hot to cool to cold. About eight-thirty, Jackie stirred in her seat.

"I can go without dinner, Sam, but I have to have warm clothes. My legs are beginning to freeze. You have to stop."

I emerged from my reverie. The dunes were all around us. At night they became frozen ocean breakers, looming high and dark above the moving truck. Sometimes my tired eyes could see long shapes scudding across their flanks. Was this the illusion that had fueled Gerald Sebastian's sea-fantasies?

"How much farther to go?"

Jackie had put her wig on again and sat hugging herself. "No more than forty miles. Two hours, at the rate we've been going. But I don't care. I want to stop and rest."

I let us coast to a halt. "Gerald will never agree to it. When he's this close he'll want to get there tonight. In less than two hours the moon will set and it will be too dark to drive."

"We'll be there in the morning."

Jackie didn't understand treasure-hunters. The idea of camping here, when we were so close to the valley . . .

Gerald popped out of the cabin of the other truck almost before it had stopped moving. "What's the problem?" His voice echoed off the dunes and he ran to peer in at us. "Why are you stopping?"

"My eyes," I said. "They're so tired I'm seeing double. And I'm cold and hungry. We have to take a break."

Jackie said nothing, but her hand touched my arm in appreciation.

"But we're almost there!" said Sebastian. "It's a straight run from here, a child could drive it."

"I know, but I need rest—and so do you."

He turned to stare at the moon. I could see his face, and although it was tired and lined his expression was perfectly sane. "Twenty minutes," he said after a moment. "That will give us time to eat. Then—"

"No." Jackie did not raise her voice. "You can do what you like, Gerald, but I'm not going any farther tonight. And Will Reynolds should be asleep in his tent, not jolting around in a truck. If you want to go on, you'll do it without Will and me."

There was a moment when I thought Sebastian would explode at her. Then he nodded, lowered his head, and marched without a word to the other truck.

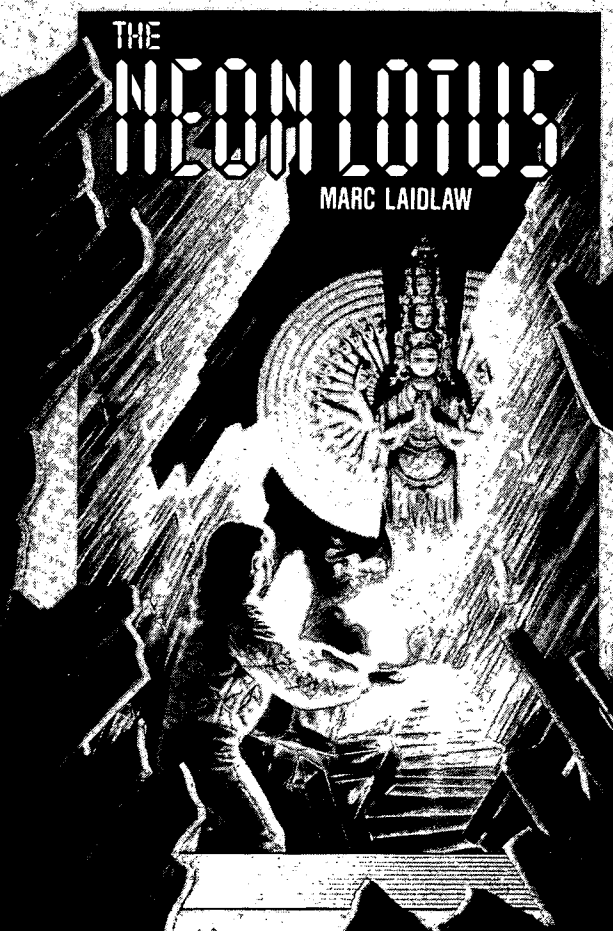
I could never earn a living as a fortune-teller. My premonition had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For a Tibetan scientist studying the reincarnation process, the secrets of life, death and rebirth are becoming crystal clear in both this life...and the next.

THE NEON LOTUS

MARC LAIDLAW



An extraordinary journey to the roof of the world.

BANTAM

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

told me that we were in for a grim evening. Instead it proved to be the most peaceful few hours since we had left Hong Kong.

Will Reynolds was fully recovered. Paddy was semi-sober. And Gerald Sebastian hid any angry feelings he had toward Jackie under icy politeness. Only his eyes betrayed him. They turned, at every gap in the conversation, to the north. On the other side of those moonlit dunes, less than forty miles away, lay his obsession. I could share his feelings.

We had halted at about eight forty-five. At nine-fifteen, when we had finished a meal of hot tinned beef and biscuits, Sebastian wandered away from the lamplight and stood looking wistfully up at the haloed moon. It was setting, and a northern breeze veiled its face with fine sand.

Abruptly he swung around and walked back to us. "I'm going on, Sam," he said to me. "I have to go on. You follow me tomorrow morning."

His voice carried the command of the expedition's leader. Jackie looked at me to raise an objection. I could not. I knew the desire too well. All I could do was wish that I could go with him.

"You have only one more hour of moonlight," I said.

"I know." He picked up a gallon container of water and climbed into the truck that I had been driving. "You're in charge here. See you tomorrow."

The truck rumbled away between the mountains of sand. We watched it leave in silence, following it with our ears for what felt like minutes. When the last faint mutter of the engine was lost, I was able to pick up in the new silence the sounds of the cooling landscape around us. It was the *mingsha* again, the song of the dunes as they lost their heat to the stars. There were faint, crystalline chimes of surface slidings, broken by lower moans of movement deep within the sandhills. It was easy to imagine voices there, the whistle and call of far-off sentinels.

"The dragon-green, the luminous, the dark, the serpent-haunted sea," said Paddy suddenly. He was gazing out beyond the circle of lamplight, and his eyes were wide. Without another word he stood up, turned, and went off to his own tent.

We stared after him. Within a couple of minutes Will Reynolds rose to his feet. He shivered, snorted, and glared at the fading moon. "Seen that in New Mexico," he said. "Dust halo. Sandstorm on the way. It'll be a bugger. Gotta get some sleep." He lurched away.

And then there were two. Jackie and I sat without speaking while the night grew colder and the sands murmured into sleep. "Did you understand what Paddy said?" she said at last.

I shook my head. Our thoughts had been running along in parallel. "He seemed to be talking about the sea, too, but we're in one of the driest places in the world. Will Reynolds made a lot more sense. I've seen that haloed moon myself in desert country. It's caused by a high dust layer.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If there's a sandstorm on the way we have to start early tomorrow, or Sebastian may be in trouble. We have all the food and the water distillation unit on this truck."

We left the camp just as it stood, the lamp still burning, and walked across to Jackie's tent. There we hesitated. "Good night, Sam," she said at last. "I don't know if I'll be able to sleep, but sweet dreams."

"And you, Jackie." Then, as she was putting her dark head into the tent, "I have some Halcion here. Sleeping tablets. If you'd like one."

She paused and pulled her head out of the tent. Then she held out her hand. "Just this once. Don't get me into bad habits."

"Tomorrow, your first cigar." I watched as she closed the tent, then walked back to turn out the lamp. The moon was on the horizon, a smoky, grey blur. Overhead no stars were visible. By the time that I stepped into my tent and climbed into my sleeping bag the night was totally dark.

Sleep is mystery, a force beyond control. The previous night, with nothing to worry about, I had been restless. Tonight, hours away from what could be the greatest event of my life, I put my head down and enjoyed the dreamless, uninvaded slumber that we mistakenly assign to small children. I did not stir until Paddy unzipped my tent and announced that I would miss coffee and eggs if I didn't get a move on. Then I woke from a sleep so deep that for a moment I had no idea where I was.

Neither Paddy nor Will seemed to remember anything strange about their last night's behavior. We were in the truck before six-thirty, facing north into a cold, grit-filled wind. Visibility was down to less than two hundred yards and we would be reduced to map and compass. It promised to be slow work, and I intended to drive carefully. This truck contained a hundred pounds of plastic explosive, and no one knew why Gerald Sebastian had brought it. Plastic is safe enough without a detonator, everyone tells you so, but it makes an uncomfortable travel companion.

I asked Will, bent over his image, for a first direction. And it was then, as I slipped into first gear and looked beyond the closest dunes to a red-brown sky, that I learned my mistake.

Sleep had not been without dreams, and Gerald Sebastian's vision was a strong one—strong enough to infect others. Night memories came flooding back to me.

It was evening, with sunset clouds of red and gold. I stood next to the green statue, but it was no longer a lonely monolith half-buried in grey sand. Now it formed part of a great line of identical statues, flanking an avenue beside a broad canal. Laden pack animals walked the embankment, camels and donkeys and heavy-set horses, and I heard the jingle of metal on carved leather harnesses. A flat-bottomed boat eased along

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

past me. The crew were tall, fair-skinned women with braided amber hair, singing to the music of a dreamy flute player cross-legged in the dragon's-head bow. Beyond the embankment, as far as I could see, buildings of white limestone rose eighty to a hundred feet above the water. They were spired and windowless, mellow in the late sunlight. The wind was at my back. I could smell apple blossom and pear blossom from the dwarf trees that grew between the statues.

I moved forward along the pebbled embankment. In half a mile the canal broadened to a lake bordered by lotus plants and water-lilies. Although the waters stretched to the purple haze of the horizon, I knew that they were fresh, not salt.

On the quiet lake, their sails dipping rose-red in the evening sun, moved dozens of small boats. It was obvious that they were pleasure craft, sailing the calm lacustrine waters for pure enjoyment.

As I watched, there was a sudden shivering of the landscape. The sky darkened, there was the sound of thunder. The buildings trembled, the road cracked, lake waters gathered and divided. The dream shattered.

"Sam!" The shout came from Jackie and Paddy in the back seat. I found we were heading at a thirty degree angle up the side of a dune, four-wheel drive scrabbling to give purchase on the shifting sands. A second before we tipped over I brought us around to head down again.

"Sorry!" I raised a hand in apology and fought back to level ground, horribly aware of our explosive cargo. "Lost concentration. It won't happen again."

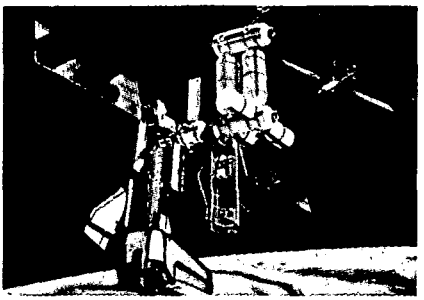
Will had just got round to looking up. "North-west, not north," he said calmly. "Look, there's his tracks. Follow them where you can."

To our left, almost hidden by blown sand, I saw the ghostly imprints of balloon tires. New sand was already drifting in to fill them. I followed their line and increased our speed. In full day, the temperature in the truck began to inch higher.

After another ten miles the tire tracks faded to invisibility. But by that time we were on the final stretch, a long, north-running ridge that led straight to the valley. Less than an hour later we were coasting down a shallow grade of powdery white sand that blew up like smoke behind us.

"Half a mile," said Will Reynolds. "Look, all the contours are right. There's a whole city underneath us, deep in the sand." He thrust an image under my nose. It showed a broad pattern of streets, picked out as dark lines on a light background. I thought I recognized the curving avenues and the sweep of a broad embankment, and saw again in my mind the white sails and the laden animals. But I had no time for more than a moment's glance. Then my attention moved to the valley ahead of us.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



NEXT STOP:
SPACE STATION

". . . I am directing NASA to develop a permanently manned Space Station, and to do it within a decade." . . . President Ronald Reagan, State of the Union message, January 25, 1984.

Are you a person of vision? Are you excited about this next new stepping stone in mankind's future? Did you know that there is a magazine that covers these developments better than any other? Did you know that there is a non-profit public interest organization, founded by famed space pioneer Dr. Wernher von Braun, that actively supports all aspects of a strong U.S. space program? That organization is the NATIONAL SPACE INSTITUTE. If you're a member, here's what you'll get:

- 12 big issues of Space World magazine. Tops in the field. Follow the political, social and technological aspects of all Space Station developments—and all other space exploration and development too!
- VIP package tours to Kennedy Space Center to watch a Space Shuttle launch—the thrill of a lifetime!
- Regional meetings and workshops—get to meet an astronaut!
- Exclusive Space Hotline and Dial-A-Shuttle services.
- Discounts on valuable space merchandise and books.
- and much, much more!

So if you are that person of vision, your eyes upon the future, excited about the adventure of space exploration, let us send you more information on how to join the NSI. Just fill in your name and address and our packet will be on its way. AND, we'll send you a FREE Space Shuttle Launch Schedule which is yours to keep whatever you decide to do!

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, & Zip _____

NATIONAL SPACE INSTITUTE
West Wing Suite 203
600 Maryland Avenue, S.W
Washington, D.C. 20024
(202) 484-1111

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He was there. So was the truck. And so was the statue. When we turned the final lip of the valley I could see the green warrior standing waist-deep in a great pit. Sebastian must have been working all night to dig it clear. Now he was leaning over the back of the truck, so uniformly covered in white dust that he was himself like a stone statue. The derrick had already been swung out over the rear of the truck. Chains were clinched around the statue's broad belly and hooked to iron cables over the pulley. Red sticks of explosive stood near it on the sand, with detonators already in place.

Our diesel made plenty of noise but Sebastian did not seem to hear us. He was working the engine on the back of his truck. As Will Reynolds and I jumped down from the front seat there was a chattering of gears and the scrape and clatter of chains. The statue moved a little, altering its angle. The sound of the engine growled to a deeper tone. The chains groaned, the statue tilted and began to lift.

I understood the plastic explosive now, but it would be unnecessary. The statue was not anchored at its base. It moved infinitely slowly, but it moved, inching up from the depths. Sand fell away from it, and after a few more seconds the ponderous torso was totally visible.

Will and I slowed our pace down the slope. There was every sign that Sebastian had matters under full control. At the same time, I marveled that he could have done so much, alone, in such a short time. The valley was perhaps a quarter of a mile long and a hundred yards across. And the white sand was everywhere, a uniform layer of unguessable depth. Judging from its general level, no more than the top of the statue's head would have peered above it when the truck first arrived. To reach the point where the chains and tackle could be attached, Gerald Sebastian must have moved many tons of dry sand.

When we were still twenty yards away, and while Paddy behind me was calling out to the unheeding Sebastian, I looked along the line of the valley. In my mind I saw a hundred companion statues stretched beneath the lonely desert. As I stared, some final load of sand was shed at the figure's base. There was a faster whirring of gears, the cable moved quickly, and the whole statue was suddenly hanging in midair. Suspended on the flexible cable, the body turned. The blind, angry gaze swung to meet me, then on to survey the whole valley.

I did not think it then, but I thought of it later. And I understood it for the first time, that simple epitaph of Tamburlaine the Great: "If I were alive, you would tremble."

As the swinging statue completed its turn, to look full on Gerald Sebastian, many things happened at once.

The sky darkened and the air filled with a perfume of apple and pear blossom, one moment before the plastic explosive by the pit blew up. A

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

flash of white fire came from it, brighter than the sun. It blinded me. When I could see again, the statue was no longer hanging from the chains. It stood on the ground, eight and a half feet high, and towered into a leaden sky. As I watched, it moved. It turned, and took one ponderous, creaking step toward Gerald Sebastian.

He screamed and backed away, lifting his hands in front of his face. But he no longer stood on powdery desert sand. He stood on a broad avenue, at the brink of a great lake bordered by apple groves. The statue took another lumbering step forward. Gerald Sebastian seemed unable to turn and run. He backed into the lake, among the lotus flowers and lilies, until the water was to his knees. Then he himself became a statue, frozen, mouth agape.

The face of his pursuer was hidden from me, but as it bent forward to stare into Sebastian's eyes I heard a cruel, rumbling laugh. I ran forward across the avenue to the edge of the lake, as a great green hand reached out and down. Sebastian was lifted, slowly and effortlessly. He hung writhing in midair, the grip around his throat cutting off his new screams.

The other hand reached forward. Sebastian's jacket was ripped from his body. Carved jade fingers stripped from beneath his shirt a ruby ring and an engraved gold tablet, and tucked them into the statue's buckled belt. "Xe ho chi!" growled a deep voice. The meaning was unmistakable: "Mine!"

There was a roar of triumph. "Ang ke-hi!" Then the statue was wading into the water, still holding Gerald Sebastian in its remorseless grip. I ran after them, splashing through the blooming water-lilies. Soon I was waist-deep in the cool lake. I halted. The green colossus strode on into deepening waters, still carrying Sebastian. As his head dipped toward the surface he gave one last cry of terror and despair. The statue raised him high in the air, then plunged him under with terrible violence. He did not reappear.

The head swung to face the shore. The blind gaze focused, found me. The wide mouth grinned in challenge.

I turned and fled from the lake, blundering up onto the embankment with its line of fruit trees. The statue was out of the water now, striding back toward me. I ran on, to cower against the shelter of a squat grey obelisk. As my soaked clothing touched its stone base there was a second burst of white light. I became blind again, blind and terror-stricken. The statue was stalking the embankment. I could hear the clanking tread of its progress.

Where could I hide, where could I run to? Again I tried to flee. Something was clutching me, holding me at thigh level.

Sight returned, and with it the beginnings of sanity. I saw a stone

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

statue before me, but it stood silent and motionless. On its belt sat a ring of ruby fire and an engraved gold tablet.

Beyond the silent effigy I saw for one moment the faint outlines of white buildings, cool green water, and a hundred tiny sails. A freshwater wind blew on my face, filled with lotus blossoms. But in moments, that vision also faded. Superimposed on its dying image appeared once more the dry, dusty valley, deep in the sterile desert. Another few seconds, and the ghostly outline of a truck flickered back into existence, then steadied and solidified. Its chains and tackle hung free, unconnected to the ancient statue beneath the derrick.

I stared all around me. Will Reynolds had fallen supine on the sand, face staring up at the overcast sky. Paddy was on his knees in front of me (but when had he run past me?), hands clapped over his ears. And it was Jackie, also on her knees, who was clutching me around the legs. She crouched with her face hidden against my thigh.

I began to stagger forward, pulling free of Jackie's grip. For Gerald Sebastian had reappeared. He was thirty yards away, face-down on the loose sand. But unlike Will he was not lying motionless. He was *swimming*, propelling himself toward me across the level surface with laborious strokes of arms and legs, striking out for an unseen shore. His breath came in great, shuddering spasms, as though he had long been deprived of air. Perhaps he had. His mouth was below the surface and he was choking on sand.

A few yards from him—unexploded and untouched—lay the sticks of red plastic.

I knelt by his side, turning his head so that he could breathe, and found that the eyes looking into mine were empty, devoid of all thought or awareness. And as I knelt there, clearing sand from his gaping mouth, sudden bright marks touched his upturned face. I heard a pattering on the dusty desert floor.

I stared up into the sky. In that valley, in the fiercest depths of the *Takla Makan Shamo*, a hundred-year event was taking place. It was raining.

Paddy Elphinstone had seen an army of warriors, swords unsheathed, sweeping down on us from across the valley. He had known that he was about to die. Jackie saw a city, perhaps the same one I had seen, but it was writhing and collapsing in the grip of a huge earthquake, while she was sliding forward into a great abyss that opened in the surface.

Will Reynolds, God help him, could not tell what vision had gripped him. Like Gerald Sebastian, he was *elsewhere*, in a mental state that permitted no communication with other humans.

When the rain shower was over I searched that valley from end to end,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

looking for anything out of place. There was the quiet, dusty slope, merging into the dunes in all directions. There was the truck, just where Gerald Sebastian had left it. There was the pit with the statue at its center, rapidly filling with new sand. A ruby ring and an engraved gold tablet were attached to the buckled belt. I took two steps that way, then halted. As I watched the sand steadily covered them. In the whole valley, nothing moved but the trickling sands.

With two terribly sick men in my charge, I had no time for more exploration. We had to leave, and I had to make a decision: would we drive north or south? In other words, would Will and Gerald receive treatment in China, or would we try to get them home through Pakistan to the United States?

Maybe I made the wrong choice, maybe it was the cowardly choice. I elected to run for home. With me driving one truck and Paddy, shocked to sobriety, the other, we set off southwest as fast as we could go. We drove night and day, cutting our sleep down as far as we dared and keeping ourselves going on strong coffee that we brewed by the gallon. Paddy leaned on me, I leaned more and more on Jackie. I said more to her in two days than I had said to anyone in forty years. Necessary talk. I brought us out, but she kept me sane.

Sixty hours later we were in Rawalpindi, and I was buying airline tickets for the long flight home.

New York again. I told the backers of the expedition the unpleasant truth: that we had taken nothing from the valley, and they had nothing to show for all their investment. They were perhaps a little upset by that, but they were far more upset when they heard what had happened to Will and Gerald, and read the medical prognoses. Either might recover, but no one could predict how or when. Henry Hoffman showed what a gentleman he was by arranging perpetual medical care at his expense for as long as the two might need it.

I went home. And it was then that I discovered I had lied—accidentally—to our financial backers. While we were still traveling I had looked at the videocamera tapes made by Sebastian on the trip, including one taken in the valley itself. It showed the same bleak desert that I remembered so well, dry sand and barren rock.

In addition to the videotapes, Gerald Sebastian had also shot several rolls of film, but I had no way of developing those until we returned home and I could get to a photolab. The films, with whatever latent images might be on their exposed surfaces, did not seem to me a high-priority item. I left them in the bottom of my luggage. At last, four days after I returned to my apartment in Albuquerque, I went to my modest photolab and developed them.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Five rolls showed Hong Kong and Pakistan, and our entry to western China. The sixth was different. I stared at the pictures for half an hour. And then I went to the telephone and placed a call to Jackie Sands in Manhattan. We talked for four hours, while little by little it dawned on me how much I had been missing her.

"I know," she said at last. "I feel the same. We could talk forever, but I'm going to hang up now. Don't do anything silly, Sam. I have to see you, and I have to see it. I'll be on the next plane out."

She had to see what I had hardly been able to describe: the sixth film. There were just three exposures on it. The first was of the green statue, with only its head showing above the sand. In the other two, the statue was uncovered to waist level. It filled most of the frame, with an expression on its face that I could only now read (*If I were alive, you would tremble*). But there was enough space at the edges for something else to show: not the dry grey of desert sands, but the cool green of water; and on the surface of that water, dwarfed by distance and slightly out of focus, a score of tiny white sails, delicate as butterfly wings. At the very edge of the frame was a hint of a broad embankment, curving away out of sight.

Jackie's plane would not arrive for another five hours, but I drove at once to the airport. I thought about her while I waited, and about one other thing. Gerald Sebastian had expected to find Atlantis. Jackie had sought aliens. Had they in one sense both been right?

There is nothing more alien to a modern American than yesterday's empires, with their arbitrary imperial powers, their cruelty, and their casual control over life and death. Humans make progress culturally, as well as technologically. Progress in one field may be quite separate from advances in the other. Suppose, then, the advanced civilization of an Atlantis; it might have technology far beyond our own, but it would have the bloody ways of a younger race. What would you expect from its emperors?

In ancient Egypt, Cheops had his Great Pyramid; Emperor Qin had his terracotta army of ten thousand at Xian. But their technology was simple, and their monuments limited to stone and clay. Imagine a great khan, king of Atlantis, with powerful technology wedded to absolute rule. How would he assure his own memory, down through the ages?

I can suggest one answer. Imagine a technology that can imprint a series of images; not just on film, or a length of tape, but on an entire land, with every molecule carrying part of the message. The countryside is saturated with signal. But like a picture on an undeveloped film, the imprint can lie latent for years or thousands of years, surviving the change from fertile land to bleak desert, until the right external stimulus comes along; and then it bursts forth. Atlantis, or Xanadu, or whatever

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

world is summoned, appears in its old glory. To some, that vision may be beautiful; to others, it is intolerable. The great khan, indifferent to suffering, laughs across the centuries and inflicts his legacy.

An idea, no more; but it fills my mind. And how can I ever test it? Only by going back to that lonely valley in the Takla Makan, providing again the stimulus of disturbance, and waiting for the result.

I would love to do it, whatever the risk. The opportunity exists. Jackie told me on the phone that Henry Hoffman, indulgent as ever, was not disappointed by the last expedition. He would be willing to finance another trip to the Takla Makan; and he will let me lead it.

An attractive offer, since to raise that much money myself would take years. To search for Xanadu. How can I say no? And yet it is not simple; for Jackie and I know the rules, even though we have never discussed them. We must begin right, or not at all. I am not Gerald Sebastian. If I let myself take Henry's money, I cannot also take his wife.

I make the decision sound difficult, but it is actually very easy. I learned the answer in the Takla Makan, and it is the only answer: for access to its rarest treasures, life offers but a single opportunity.

Xanadu has waited for thousands of years; it must wait a few years longer. ●

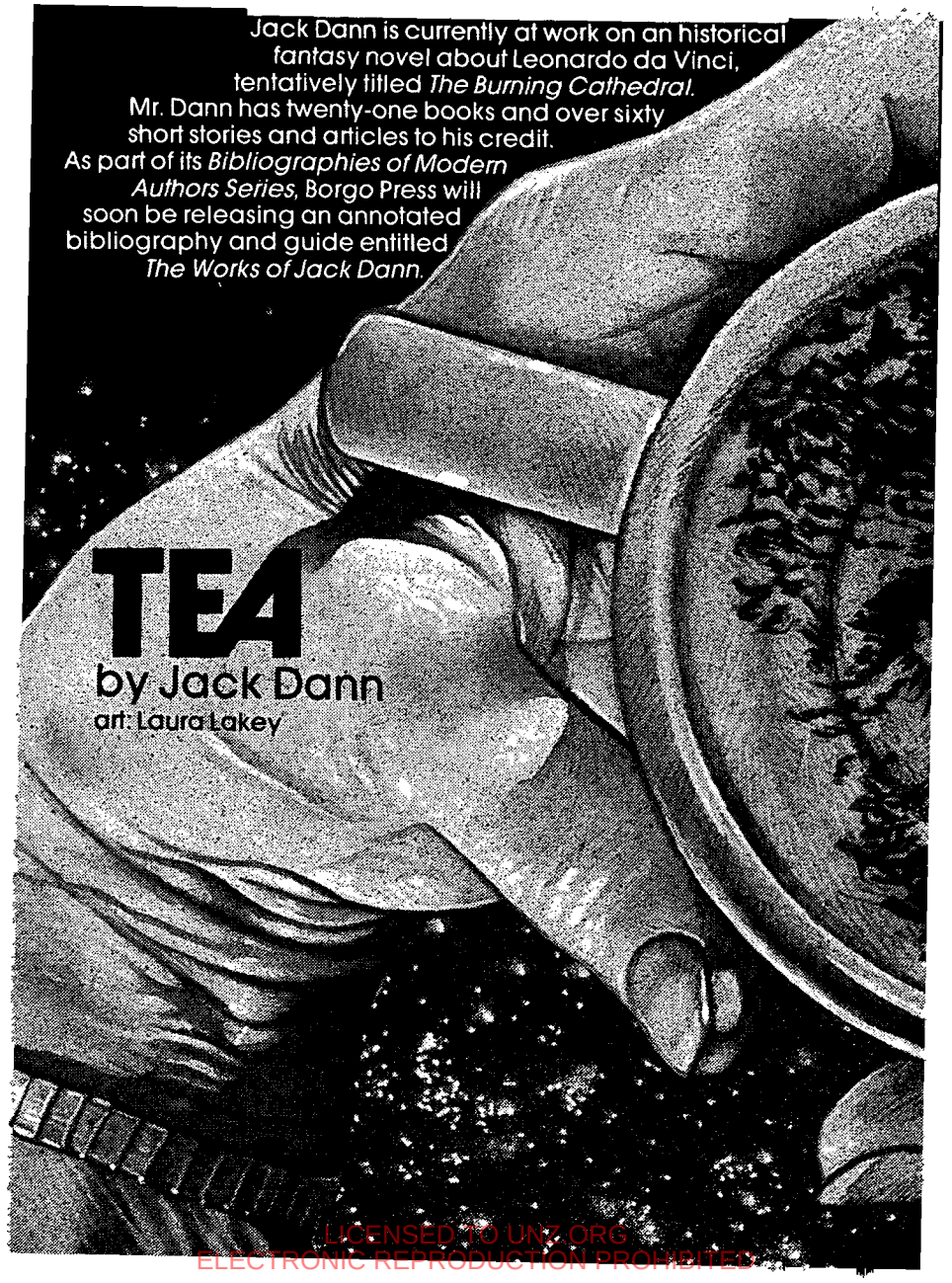
1988 CLARION WRITING WORKSHOP

The twenty-first Clarion Workshop in Science Fiction and Fantasy Writing will be held from June 26 to August 7 at Michigan State University.

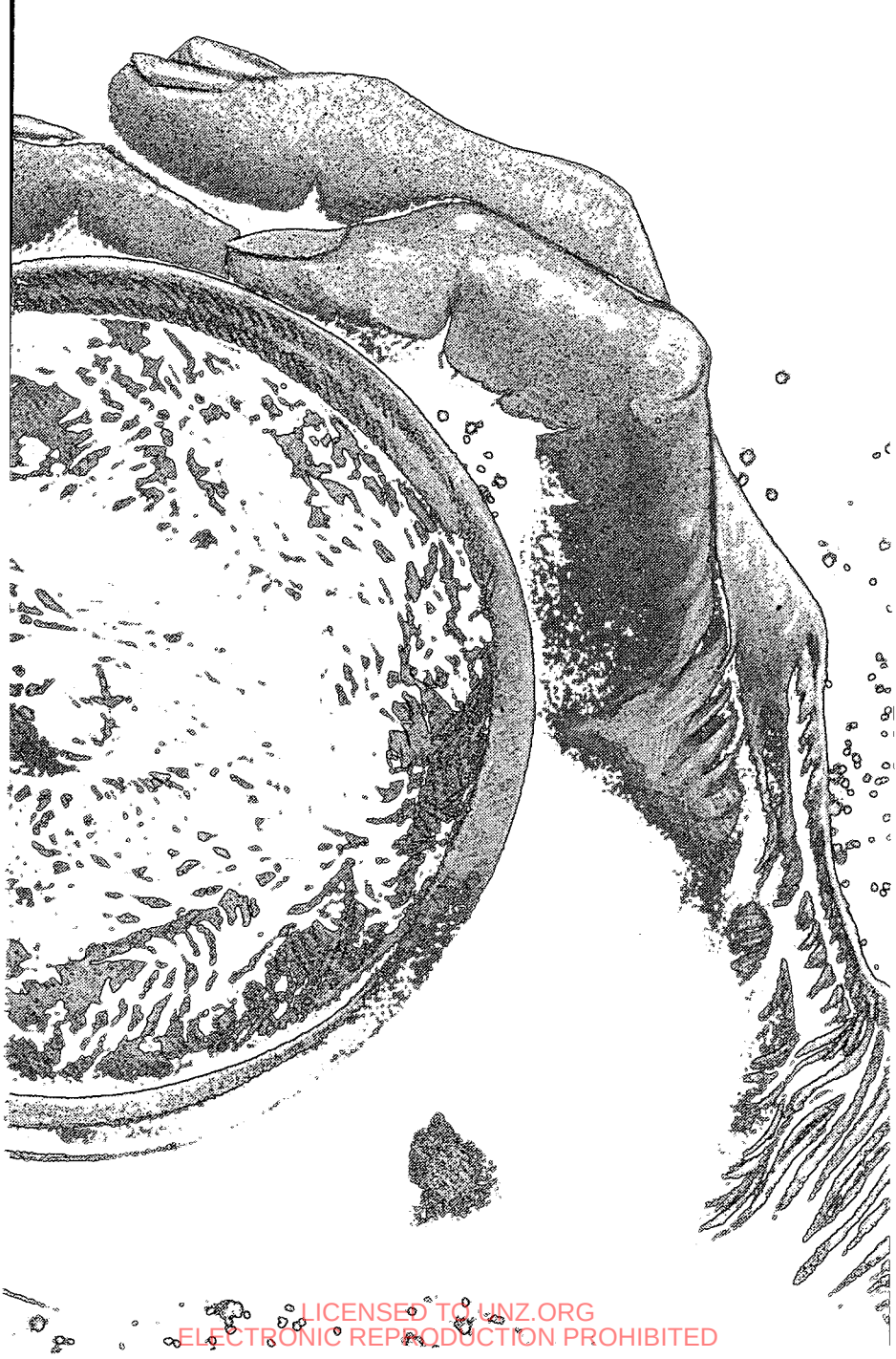
Writers-in-Residence will be Tim Powers, Lisa Goldstein, Samuel R. Delany, Kim Stanley Robinson, Kate Wilhelm, and Damon Knight.

For applications and further information, write to Prof. Albert Drake, Director, Clarion '88, Holmes Hall, Lyman Briggs School, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824. Application deadline is April 1, 1988.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED


Jack Dann is currently at work on an historical fantasy novel about Leonardo da Vinci, tentatively titled *The Burning Cathedral*. Mr. Dann has twenty-one books and over sixty short stories and articles to his credit. As part of its *Bibliographies of Modern Authors Series*, Borgo Press will soon be releasing an annotated bibliography and guide entitled *The Works of Jack Dann*.
TEA
by Jack Dann
art: Laura Lakey

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lorelei met Mr. Fleitman the same day that she had covered all the windows in her apartment with aluminum foil.

It had been a pure day, completely clear and lambent, and Lorelei sat on her tiny side-porch, taking in the morning sun, and gazing out at a strip of ocean that was visible from the porch. She was sitting beside the corner where the rather rickety railings met, and by leaning over ever-so-much, she could see the play of light on the now-turquoise ribbon of water. It was still as a mirror, more like lake-water than the smashing waves that sprayed the rocks and stones of what she considered the "primitive" part of the beach. Most of the beach in Sea-Gate, a tiny walled city on the eastmost tip of Brooklyn, was combed white sand; although in the last few years dead black fish and spots of tar had begun to appear on the shore like a sin.

But for now, as far as Lorelei was concerned, it was all fresh and white and beautiful. She could hear the waves and the screeing of the gulls that wheeled overhead like soft-shaped white angels. And for this luminous moment, as she sipped her sweetened tea, she forgot who she was now and felt like a young girl. If she didn't touch her face, which was wrinkled and dry as parchment, even though she used oils and creams and balms, she could imagine that she was once again thirty. Her fingers ached slightly—arthritis—but then she had had those pains when she was a girl. The important thing was that she not look at her hands, which were further reminders of how time had ravaged her, but at the universe outside; that she keep her focus on the stone perron steps and the sidewalk and the chockablock two-family houses that were made of stone and bleached like bones from angry howling winters and summer days like this. There was a high mesh fence on the other side of the wide street below her, which was Atlantic Avenue, and sand and sea behind it; but her own building cut off most of the view to the left, and a large, ugly, transient hotel cut off the view to the right.

Which left only the ribbon of sand and sea.

But she had the sky and the gulls and this perfect translucent day. Still, she couldn't remain too long in the sun, for it was dangerous. It would wreck and wrinkle her skin, and at her age could cause cancer. So she went back inside, going immediately to her little bathroom off the kitchen to freshen her face and comb and spray her hair. She had had a permanent just last week, and it was still tight and wiry. Nevertheless, the wind had blown a few golden strands out of place.

The mirror had become an enemy these past forty years, as was to be expected, but she had become accustomed to the face that looked back at her, had become so used to it that she had long ago stopped seeing it for what it was. She had made the proper corrections in her mind so that what she really saw was a more mature version of the pretty, youthful

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

face men used to admire. She saw the thick make-up she used as her skin, smooth as oiled wood, and her eyes were still clear, although she needed her contact lenses in place in order to see them.

But this morning, as she gazed into the mirror affixed to the rather cheap medicine cabinet, the glass tricked her.

It happened so suddenly, as if she had somehow caught a false reflection with her peripheral vision; and in that horrifying, petrifying instant she saw her mother-in-law, whom she had taken care of like a baby after Sam died, until her mother-in-law, too, had died of cancer. Lorelei glimpsed what she knew with dead certainty was her true self: an old woman painted up in clownish imitation of a young girl.

She had had glimpses such as this before, but somehow this one was so terribly strong that it would not be denied.

And she could do nothing but accept and grieve for that face in the mirror.

Afraid of looking into the mirror again, Lorelei went into the kitchen and washed the make-up and lipstick from her face. Then she took out a roll of aluminum foil from the drawer and neatly and methodically covered every mirror and window in her apartment, for every window could also become a mirror. Layer by layer, she applied the foil to the glass panes, as if she were a mason bricking up a tomb, a final refuge, secure and dark.

It was an inspired act of creation and desperation.

She used transparent tape to secure the foil, pressing it into the relief and grooves of the sashes and stiles to insure permanence. Although the foil was reflective, its surface was too wrinkled and distorted to harm her. It was what every mirror should be: opaque and dull as silver paint.

When she was finished, she felt better.

She sat down to tea in her newly-darkened, postage stamp living room and felt safe once again, as she had when she was first married to Sam, God rest his soul, or when she was a little girl and living at home in her parents' fifth floor walk-up in Brighton. She had made a pact with shadow and darkness, for there, in pools of gray and silver and velvet, she could be—if not forever young—at least hidden from the harridan that had gazed back at her in the bathroom mirror.

And then there was a light, tentative tapping at her door.

Lorelei considered not answering it, but she was superstitious, and it seemed to her odd and propitious that someone should knock at her door just now. "Who is it?" she asked, after a considered amount of time.

"Viktor Fleitman, your neighbor from downstairs. I'm a bit embarrassed to be asking, but might I impose upon you to borrow some tea, and perhaps a little sugar? It seems I've managed to run out of both at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the same time. I shall be going to the grocery tomorrow and can repay you then."

Lorelei had seen the old man who lived downstairs. He was always polite and actually rather nice looking. Like her, he kept mostly to himself and was, in fact, somewhat of a mystery. She hadn't intended to let him into her apartment, but when she finally opened the door to give him his sugar and teabags, which she had individually wrapped in plastic sandwich bags for him, he stood in the doorway and looked around the room. His gaze rested for an instant on the aluminum-foiled windows, and he nodded. She didn't know why he did that, yet somehow she couldn't help feeling that he alone understood and comprehended something deep and precious and profound about her that was hidden to the rest of the world.

The miracle of it all for Lorelei was that she knew Mr. Fleitman to be almost blind.

Yet he had looked around the room.

Perhaps he was able to make out vague shapes. But could he have recognized the foil covering the windows? Perhaps he had nodded only in appreciation of the darkness of the room. But it meant much more to Lorelei, who could recognize deep and symbolic truths in the most mundane gesture or odd happenstance, as if she were reading Tarot cards or tea leaves or the very entrails of things. When she had had a family, they were always asking her to read their tea leaves, as did her friends; and she was very good. She had seen Uncle Harry's death, hadn't she, and Lorraine's wedding in the tarry black shapes that stuck to the sides and bottoms of their cups.

"Would you care for a cup of tea while you're here?" Lorelei asked Mr. Fleitman, surprising even herself with her boldness; but he seemed especially eager for the company, and for a time she forgot about herself and her revelation in the mirror. The world was now reduced to the comfortable rustling of napkins and the awkward yet reassuring whisper of small talk.

It wasn't just coincidence that Mr. Fleitman had come to her door on that very day; it was providence.

Lorelei was certain of that.

Every Wednesday Mr. Fleitman came upstairs from his first floor apartment for afternoon tea.

It had become a formal ritual for both of them, the high point of each of Lorelei's uneventful weeks. Not much of a life, but what else was she to do? On Friday nights she lit Sabbath candles and waved her hands over them in circles as her mother and her grandmother before her had done, and she would sit in the living room and watch them quickly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

evaporate into the glass candleholders. Lorelei was not a devout woman, though she believed in God and was a Jew. But just about everything else had slipped past her: the years, her life, her husband, her looks . . . and her daughter, may she live and be well, who had her own children now and her own life to lead.

But this Wednesday Mr. Fleitman was late, which was most unusual. He apologized, and Lorelei was overly solicitous, which was her way. However, she felt she had reason to be because of Mr. Fleitman's blindness, or poor sight, as he insisted. She had once been to his apartment, and had felt very uncomfortable, as she would have in any man's apartment. It was very cluttered and messy, and there were records everywhere—it was a wonder he could ever find them to return to the library—for he played the "talking books." But there had been paintings on all the walls, covering every inch, it seemed, as if they themselves were reminders of sight; most likely, they had been hung when he could still see and appreciate them.

"I was a bit worried about you," Lorelei said, "but then I thought that something important must have come up and—"

"No, no, Mrs.Lanzman, I'm fine, I assure you," Mr. Fleitman said as they sat down to tea at the little folding table she had prepared in the living room. She had covered it with linen, of course, and her silver tea set on its filigreed tray almost glowed in the dim light from a lamp in the corner. "I took a short nap and didn't hear the alarm. Or else I turned it off in my sleep." He made a soft clucking noise, as if he were admonishing himself.

"Well, you must have needed to rest," Lorelei said. She could detect the trace of a foreign accent in his voice, but that was mostly because he spoke very precisely, although she remembered that he had once told her that he had been born in Villach, Poland. He had emigrated here when he was very young. He had been a tailor, and had made custom shirts and suits for personages such as Prince Oblensky, who was residing in America, and would have been in line to be the crown prince of Russia, but for the revolution.

But that was all before Mr. Fleitman's eyes had clouded. Before he was forced to retire.

Lorelei loved his stories . . . and, of course, believed them.

This was going to be a good afternoon; she could feel it. Mr. Fleitman sat stiffly at the table, as he always did, gazing right at her, although not focusing on anything in particular, and smiled. He wore a black double-breasted suit and a wide vermilion tie; his clothes were pressed and fit perfectly, even though they were years out of fashion. But perhaps in these times that didn't matter, Lorelei told herself, because now practically everything is back in fashion. Still, it was much too hot for such

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

clothes, although it pleased her that he always dressed when he came upstairs for tea.

"Tell me about your name," Mr. Fleitman asked. "We are always so formal, you and I."

"Well, I know that it comes from the German, and means countryman—"

"No, no, I mean Lorelei, which is such a beautiful and uncommon name."

Lorelei brushed her hand through her stiff, bleached hair, a self-conscious gesture; nevertheless, she was pleased. "It comes from a German legend, I think. My mother insisted on the name, although my father hated it. And when I was growing up here in Brooklyn, I did too. There weren't a lot of children named Lorelei." The boys used to refer to her as Lori-lie-down, although, contrary to their opinions, she was a virgin until she got married.

"But you came to like it."

"Well, it was different, certainly." But what she couldn't express was that the name had somehow formed her, had once given her the appearance of beauty, even though she certainly had not been a beauty. But she *had* been a siren; indeed, that was once how she thought of herself: as wild, smoking cigarettes, not averse to having a drink in a speakeasy.

"So you spent your youth combing your hair with a golden comb by the river, while sailors and fishermen crashed on the rocks for love of you." Lorelei blushed and giggled, as if she were nineteen once again and out on a first date in a terribly sophisticated club.

"Do you mind if I call you Lorelei?" Mr. Fleitman asked.

Lorelie was pleased with the new intimate turning their relationship had suddenly taken, although she enjoyed the formality of last names; it was somehow romantic and mysterious . . . and safe. But she said, "Of course we should use our first names. We are, after all, old friends."

"Good, then so be it . . . Lorelei." He used the word that first time hesitatingly, but immediately went on in his cool, sure manner. "And you should call me Viktor. I do have one other request, though. Would you be kind enough to read my tea leaves?" Mr. Fleitman asked.

That took her aback. Mr. Fleitman was certainly full of the unexpected today. "Yes, of course," she said, "but how on earth did you know about that?"

"Mrs. Simpson told me you were very good. She raved about you." Mrs. Simpson was Lorelei's next-door neighbor—and Lorelei would also have to admit that she was her friend—a flabby-armed woman who always wore flowered sun dresses in the summer; they seemed to exaggerate, rather than hide, her considerable weight. "Yes, my daughter met her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the hallway once and told her about that, so she came to my door and asked for a reading the very next day. But she didn't seem very happy with what I had to tell her, which is why I'm always a little nervous about giving readings. I never used to do them for my family, but they insisted. I didn't mind doing it for cousins, but with immediate family I was always afraid I would see something terrible in their cup, and when you love somebody—"

"Well, you'll have no worries such as that with me," Mr. Fleitman said. "But if it's going to make you uncomfortable in any way . . ."

Lorelei went back to the kitchen for more tea; she had used a very good tea to steep in her teapot, but it was a bag. She had given readings using teabags—she would just break the teabag with her spoon—but she didn't feel right about doing it that way, somehow. Everything always looked wrong. So when he was finished with his cup, she gave him loose tea, a wonderfully pungent black oolong that she had bought directly from the owner of a Vietnamese restaurant in Coney Island.

"Just let it settle for a bit before you drink," she said, and they sat in the shadowy darkness for a moment without speaking. Mr. Fleitman would often lapse into silence and Lorelei had learned that she didn't have to try desperately to fill in those awkward moments with small talk. Lorelei relaxed; it seemed that when Mr. Fleitman was here, she enjoyed and appreciated the odd juxtaposition of day-noise and cool interior shadow as if it were all her creation and idea. She had often considered tearing the foil from the windows. She had lived in the dark long enough, but she couldn't bring herself to destroy one of her few acts that she felt had any meaning.

The darkness was her security. Only here could she be safe. Here she could shut off the world like a lamp. If she wished, she could be as blind as Mr. Fleitman within these dim autumnal confines: too often light and sight brought remembrance, which for Lorelei could only be a euphemism for sorrow. The clearest, cleanest, most beautiful day could always turn on her, bringing back the fickle, mundane, heartbreaking memories of Lorelei's youth and the stabbing, aching loneliness. Then she would remember swimming at Brighton Beach with boys in striped wool swimsuits that covered their chests and legs. She would return to the days of shingled hair and cloche hats and family picnics and week-long vacations in Atlantic City, and her young husband's quiet, gentle lovemaking "so as not to wake up the children": all the transparent, lingering moments that were the essence of joy and promise. Even now, in the dimness of her living room, she could almost smell popcorn and hear the boardwalk barkers on a neon-frosted Saturday night, could almost see her husband's handsome, youthful face superimposed upon Mr. Fleitman's.

Lorelei could easily make out Mr. Fleitman's features, for it wasn't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dark in her living room, just dim, a twilight of sorts. She had turned the art deco floor lamp on, but the three-way bulb was on its lowest setting, and the scalloped rose-tinted glass cover gave little illumination; it just glowed, as if light were passing through a stained-glass window. But light streamed in from the kitchen, where she kept the overhead light on, and through the cracks around the front door.

Lorelei had always thought Mr. Fleitman was a handsome man, with his high cheekbones, his shock of white hair that was receding just a bit at the temples (and was also just a bit thin in the back), his intense blue eyes that seemed too small for his wide face, and the deep cleft in his chin. Lorelei liked that, the cleft, for, to her mind, it signified strength and character.

When he finished his second cup of tea, Lorelei snapped the glass-bowled art deco lamp that stood in the corner of the room to its highest illumination and looked at Mr. Fleitman's tea leaves. She swished the tea and the small amount of liquid in the cup to distribute the leaves and then turned the cup over the saucer to drain away the liquid. Then she looked for pictures and symbols and signs and portents in the almost crystalline patterns of the tea leaves. Most of them were on the bottom of the cup, and the sides were unusually clean. It was like looking down upon a microscopic land cut with streams and valleys; but almost in the center was a cross; exposed hairlines of porcelain.

"Well, tell me what you see, my dear Lorelei."

But she saw more than just a cross, and it was an oddly shaped cross at that. She had a sense that she was looking down into a strange, wild country; she imagined that she was seeing a specific place, a town, perhaps, for there were houses and roads, and surrounding the town were hills. The black lumps and scatterings of tea looked like deep forest, and she imagined that she could see people, masses of people in . . . but only dormitories came to mind. Then, as she stared into the cup, a symbol began to form. That's how it always happened, but usually she saw only the symbols which she had once read on a teacup that she had bought at a five-and-dime, a cup and saucer specifically made for tea readings. She remembered the thirteen symbols and their very short interpretations that were painted on the bone-white cup and saucer.

Lorelei had expected, had looked for, hearts, clover leaves, birds, eggs, keys, boots, grapes, ships, triangles, lilies, and the like, but instead she imagined that she was seeing this town, and drawn over it was a blotch of tea that looked like a bird's wing. But she knew it was a cloak. From the configuration of the tea leaves, she thought she could make out the figure of a man wearing the cloak, but the figure was so misshapen and ill-defined that it could be anything one imagined; the cloak, however, was perfect. She looked intently into the teacup, for she had seen that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

same cloak in Uncle Harry's cup before he died, and this one looked exactly like it. Of course, it didn't necessarily have to mean death, she supposed, rationalizing.

But a chill feathered up her spine, nevertheless. Lorelei was shaken; and had it not been dim in the room, and had not Mr. Fleitman been near-blind, he would have seen the color drain from her face.

"I am getting quite anxious," Mr. Fleitman said, a touch of humor in his voice. "Here I am, totally at your mercy."

"According to the cup you're a religious man," Lorelei said, not wanting to tell him just yet of the cape. "I see a cross, but everything else—" she shrugged, feeling awkward and somehow embarrassed. Mr. Fleitman didn't respond; he just waited for her to continue. "I can't quite make out what it all means. I see what looks like a village, and people, and maybe forest." She paused and then said, "And I also see a figure that looks like it's wearing a cloak."

"Ah," Mr. Fleitman said. "And is that good or bad?"

"It means you should take care of yourself, and be careful."

"And what should I be careful of?" he asked.

Lorelei wasn't sure if he was teasing. "You should just be careful."

"What exactly does the cloak mean?"

"Just what I told you."

"Does it mean death, Lorelei?" Mr. Fleitman asked.

"It could . . . in some cases," she said. "But I would interpret it as some kind of danger, which could be financial, or anything. If you're careful, you'll be just fine." Lorelei smiled at him, although she knew well enough what the cape meant. But she didn't want to alarm him. Maybe it did just mean danger or risk.

That was entirely possible, too.

But Mr. Fleitman didn't look upset about the reading, Lorelei thought. More than likely, he just doesn't believe it, which is probably all to the good.

Yet she thought it strange that he looked somehow relieved. As if she had told him that she had seen the happy symbols of lilies, acorns, grapes, or the sun in the glistening configurations of his tealeaves.

As if she had given him good news.

It was already dark; Lorelei was going out the door to buy groceries for the week at the Pathmark, when she saw Mrs. Simpson waiting for her. Mrs. Simpson's door was wide open, always a sure sign she wanted to talk; all her lights were blazing, and she was dusting furniture in her living room. Her husband Milton was nowhere to be seen, which meant that he was asleep in the bedroom. The only air conditioner in their apartment was in the bedroom.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Hello, Lorelei, how are you? You've had me a bit worried."

"Why on earth would you be worried about me, Mavis, I'm just fine," Lorelei said, expecting trouble. Mrs. Simpson was a busybody, although Lorelei had to admit to herself that she loved to hear all the neighborhood gossip. But Lorelei wanted to get on her way; it felt like the temperature was a hundred degrees in this hallway. Outside the night air would be cool, but it was dangerous to be on the streets. She had wanted to be back by ten.

"Well, you haven't been out of your apartment for a week."

"I didn't need to be."

"And then when you do go out, it's at night, which isn't safe at all. Who ever heard of shopping in the middle of the night?"

"It's not the middle of the night," Lorelei said. "And many people shop when I do. The supermarkets are very busy now."

Mavis averted her eyes, and then, as if her mind had once again slipped into a familiar groove, she looked back at Lorelei and said, "It's still not right to just sit in the dark all the time."

"I don't just sit in the dark, I also sit on my balcony," Lorelei said, lying, a touch of sarcasm in her voice, for Mrs. Simpson didn't have a balcony, although her apartment was much larger than Lorelei's.

"Well, I've told you how I feel about all of that. . . ."

"Yes, you've told me a hundred times, Mavis, but you know, it's—"

"I know, it's none of my business."

"I don't mean to sound so nasty," Lorelei said, "but, really, I'm just fine."

"I'm sorry," Mavis said. "I shouldn't make judgments; after all, we all live in glass houses. I did want to talk with you, though, about Mr. Fleitman. But if you think I'm just prying into your affairs, I'll keep my mouth shut and my door closed."

"Mavis, we've been neighbors over fifteen years. You're my friend. What about Mr. Fleitman?"

"I can't talk about it in the hallway, for Heaven's sake. Put your shopping cart in here," she said, meaning the living room, "and I'll make you a cup of tea."

Lorelei rested her folding shopping cart against Mrs. Simpson's living room wall and followed her into the kitchen. "You know, Mr. Fleitman is really a very nice man. I can't imagine why you dislike him so."

"Now I never said I dislike him, and you know that, but he's so . . . shadowy. And now I know why. My intuitions are always sound."

"What are you talking about?" Lorelei asked.

They sat down at the kitchen table. The kitchen was very large, with a tiled bathroom adjacent to it. A window beside the table overlooked other buildings, brownstones. On another wall, which was papered in a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

confusing floral pattern, was a black cat clock, which had glowing red eyes that moved back and forth and a fake pendulum in the shape of a tail. And on the remaining wall, which was not papered, hung an ornate cross that always made Lorelei uncomfortable. Mrs. Simpson was a devout Catholic, and Lorelei could understand and respect that, but she still thought it somehow inappropriate to sip tea and gossip while Christ hung in his agony from the wall.

"Maybe I shouldn't tell you this, it's just going to make trouble."

"Now stop fencing around, Mavis, and get on with it. You certainly can't leave it at this . . . you're having too much fun."

"That's a terrible thing to say," Mavis said as she gave Lorelei a cup with a fresh teabag on the saucer; then she poured herself some coffee. There was an envelope on the table; she opened it and removed a yellowed scrap of newsprint.

"What's that?" Lorelei asked. She was too distracted even to put her teabag into the water.

But Mavis hid it in her folded hands. "I've been trying to think how to tell you. Milton's known for years and never told me, until I found this." She waved the paper. "You know how Milton is, like a clam. He said it would only make trouble. But I still think you should know, here—" and she handed Lorelei the newspaper clipping.

It had to be thirty years old. When she opened it, the paper cracked like ceiling plaster on the edges and where it had been folded. She read: NAZI WAR CRIMINAL RESIDES IN BROOKLYN. The small print described an Austrian doctor who was accused of performing selections, of sending Jews and gypsies and political prisoners to the gas chambers in the Polish concentration camp Birkenau. Lorelei felt the blood drain from her face. She felt dizzy and the print seemed to waver before her.

"This can't be," she whispered, thinking of Mr. Fleitman as being so courteous, gallant, and soft-spoken. She gasped, remembering. It had all been in the tea leaves. She felt herself tremble and through sheer will controlled it. His life and deeds and sins and passions were represented in microcosm in the cup. The leaves had settled into his patterns and had formed a delicate, literal representation of hell. Lorelei had seen it, but hadn't been able to interpret what she saw. The cross was a swastika, and what she had thought was a village was, in fact, a concentration camp. Those townspeople modeled in the bottom of the cup were internees.

And death . . . the cape.

Mr. Fleitman wasn't going to die, she should have seen that. *He* was the cape.

But that was just impossible.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm afraid it is," Mavis said. "It gives his name, which was an alias, right there in the article."

Lorelei saw his name, but it didn't register, for she was reading the words as she would tea leaves. The words and letters had suddenly lost all their original meanings; they became runes, inkings and smudgings on old paper that might just as well have been written in some swirling Persian script or Egyptian hieroglyphs. She laid the scrap of newsprint down on the formica tabletop.

"Well, I see you've landed your prey," said a man's voice. It was Milton, who wore Bermuda shorts and a bleached white vee-neck undershirt that exposed his curly gray chest hair. He was pot-bellied and spindle-legged, but he had a full head of hair and, except for a double-chin, was not really bad-looking. His hair was disheveled and one side of his face was blotched red from the pressure of his pillow or his arm. "Good evening, Lorelei. My wife was bound and determined to get that information to you." He nodded toward the scrap of newspaper. "But it all happened a long, long time ago, and nothing more was ever heard about it."

"Was he acquitted?" Lorelei heard herself say.

Milton shrugged, then sat down. "That's all I know. Nobody's ever said a word about it, and I can promise you that Mavis will abide by the same rule from now on." He glanced sharply at his wife, who returned his gaze matter of factly. They had lived together for fifty years, had worn each other smooth; Lorelei had never heard them argue, and walls were thin.

"Well, I had better get to my shopping," Lorelei said.

"Are you angry with me for telling you? After all, he was a Nazi, and you being a Jew, I thought . . ."

"No, you were absolutely right to tell me," Lorelei said.

"I think the whole thing would have been better left alone," Milton said. "What the hell difference does it make? If he was a criminal, he would've been put in jail. Isn't that right, Mavis?" he said pointedly.

Mavis shrugged and would not meet his eyes.

Lorelei calmly got up, thanked them for the tea and information, took her grocery cart, and left.

She went shopping as planned, so as not to let her neighbors know anything was wrong. But when she returned to her apartment, and after she unpacked her three double-bagged sacks of groceries, she methodically tore down the aluminum foil from every window in her apartment. It took her over an hour, for she stripped away every piece of tape, every crinkle of foil. She felt exhausted when she had finished, as if she had been running or lifting, and she sat down in the cushioned chair in the living room and fell asleep. Now she was vulnerable even in the humid, unprotecting darkness.

When she woke up, after what seemed only a nodding instant, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

morning sun poured in, as golden and artificial-looking as margarine, but its warmth was not life-giving, for, like the tea leaves, it was just another representation. It enervated her; and she could feel it drying her out like a dead thing left on cement. There could be no safety now. Somehow she had always known that. But in the cool aluminum-foiled darkness, she had been able to forget.

She sat there in her chair and looked at her hands, runneled with blue veins, as if she were examining old photographs found in an attic. She could feel the air becoming hotter with every moment, and there was a cloying smell in the room. It was a familiar odor, one that she remembered as a little girl: the close, sweet smell of old people that pervaded their bodies and their rooms.

The days passed by, white and blue and golden yellow, invading her rooms, streaming through her windows, and she went about her business as if nothing was wrong, except she wouldn't go out of the house. Only at night did she feel a little better, but still not protected, for the windows that had allowed the sunlight to pass could now become opaque, soul-shattering mirrors . . . unless she sat in darkness, which she did. She adapted. She fixed herself quick meals in the microwave that her daughter had bought her and waited.

During the days she waited and remembered, for the sun was her enemy, bringing her no revelation, just clarity: memory: all the times, the lulling family regularities, which promised to go on for eternity, until children grew up, or died, as did her first child, Katherine, hit by a car when she was eight. She remembered, even with her eyes squinted shut to give her the solace of darkness, but there she was again at the kitchen sink, washing dishes with Ivory Soap when she heard a noise outside, and then the shouting of children, as they came to the door to tell her that it was her child. Her child. Running out of the apartment in her pink and blue housedress, down four flights of worn stairs covered with broken rubber, and there was her daughter, lying on the sidewalk beside scraggly bushes, her hair clean and shiny, her white dress merely smudged with everyday dirt. She was perfectly fine. Asleep.

Dead.

And Sam begging her forgiveness for having had a fling with that secretary who worked on Mott Street. Oh, she remembered, remembered when the woman came to her home to tell her that she was pregnant and that she, Lorelei, should give Sam a divorce. Lorelei remembered her name, Fran Kempton, and she was thick-featured and full-bodied, and her hair was long and luxurious and she wore a pillbox hat and black patent shoes. Her dress was silk gauze with black trim, and the harlot carried a fox fur in the middle of the afternoon. She sat herself

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

right down, big as life, at Lorelei's kitchen table, as if she had come in for an ordinary visit. All she had wanted was Sam. "Let her have him," she had told her mother, but Sam wanted Lorelei, who had left him, and he pestered and soft-talked her mother, the whole family, until they convinced Lorelei to take him back because she was pregnant with Litta, and a child needed a father. And then regular days, white with snow and white with sun, and weddings and parties and meals, and then Lorelei's mother died and Sam's mother moved in with them, and more regular days, merging, becoming one long day, and Sam died and his mother lived and called for tea every hour, even on her deathbed, each eternal day leaving a tiny mark, until she found herself here, in her living room, her face the map of her experiences, and yet . . . it was a lie. It couldn't be almost over.

It had hardly begun.

And yet she was alone and achingly lonely. How could that be? she asked herself as the sun heated her apartment like tin on a roof.

Where were Sam and Katherine? How could it be that only Litta, her second daughter, was alive? How could it be . . . ?

But Litta had her own life to lead; she had always been very independent.

Lorelei made tea for her dead mother-in-law and drank it herself.

Lorelei didn't answer the phone, which didn't ring that often, but when it did she would count the rings. Most likely, it was her daughter, Litta . . . who else could it be? And there were knockings at the door: that, she thought, must be Mavis, for she didn't hear the squeak and groan of the stairs, as she would if anyone came up or down. She began to listen, to lose herself in every sound: birds screeing, cars passing, the muffled conversations of Mavis and Milton next door, the comings and goings of those in the house, but the ache of being alone never left her. It was only magnified now, as if Mr. Fleitman's past revealed in the tea leaves had sensitized her.

The second knocking at the door was not Mavis, for she heard someone coming up the stairs. It had to be Litta because after a while there was a knock on Mavis's door, and the door opened and shut, and then the phone rang, sixteen rings, and there were more knockings. Her surmise was correct because Litta called to her from the other side of the door. She sounded terribly upset, and, inexplicably, angry, but Lorelei simply couldn't respond. She was frozen in her folding chair by the table where she had been playing solitaire. She wanted to see her daughter, but she was punishing herself, for growing old, for being a fool, for misreading Mr. Fleitman and his cards. And, anyway, her daughter never came to see her unless she was worried and feeling guilty.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I shouldn't let her worry, Lorelei thought, yet still she sat there, thumbing the cards, as if imprisoned in this empty, roasting tomb of an apartment. After a half-hour or so, there was more stomping up the stairs, talking in the hall, and a firm, hard knocking.

It was announced that the police were here.

Lorelei opened the door and, feigning her most innocent and coquettish manner, asked what on earth all the commotion was about. "I'm fine," she told the policeman standing before her. Litta stood beside him, and Mavis, ever nosy and interested, stood behind them in her doorway. "I must have been asleep," she lied to Litta.

"How could you not have heard me knocking," Litta said. "And I let the phone ring off the hook." She looked like her mother had at her age: the same thick brown hair, full of highlights; an angular, intense face that could subtly change from openness to slyness; her changeable facial expressions produced an aura of mystery that men found attractive—that and her deeply-set blue eyes (which gave her the appearance of distance and aloofness) and her full peasant mouth. Litta also had her mother's trim figure and slightly oversized bust. Even now, after having three children, she looked like a child-woman, exuberant, constantly animated.

But for Lorelei, she was another mirror.

"I dreamed I heard knocking," Lorelei said, "but I haven't been able to sleep lately, and so I took two of those pills Dr. Ashman gave me. I guess I needed the sleep." She smiled at Litta and at the policeman, who, satisfied that all was in order, politely excused himself.

Lorelei thanked Mavis for her concern and invited her daughter in for coffee—Litta didn't drink tea—and after Lorelei opened the windows to "air the place out" (orders from her daughter), they spent the afternoon talking about the grandchildren and Litta's husband, who was in advertising, and they reminisced about the old days, and Litta, of course, was "thrilled and relieved" that her mother had finally taken down the foil from the windows.

"I never understood why you did that," she said. "I always felt it was partly my fault, I know I don't get to see you often enough—"

"You're busy, you've got a life to lead."

"That's no excuse," Litta said. "If you were only closer to us. It takes almost two hours to get here from the Island." But she didn't offer to give up her guest room.

"I wouldn't live anywhere else but here, anyway," Lorelei said, lying. But could she have stood to live in her daughter's house? To observe life pulsing all around her, to sit and watch this younger version of herself taking up the whole present, constantly reminding Lorelei that all she had was a past?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I would have put up the aluminum foil, with or without you," Lorelei said. That was probably a lie too.

And then again, maybe it wasn't.

Lorelei waited. Her daughter called once, and that was that. The days seemed to lengthen, and she felt like a child again, living through a succession of endlessly boring days.

She thought about Mr. Fleitman. Although he had knocked on her door this past Wednesday (at least Lorelei assumed it was him), she had refused to answer. She was determined never to see him. But he deserved at least the courtesy of a fair trial. Had he been a Nazi? Had he really done terrible things? And why, why on earth had he come to Brooklyn? Why had he stayed here after that newspaper article? Had he been tried? What would he say if he knew I was Jewish? But he must know.

And everyone deserves a chance. . . .

Those were the thoughts that collected themselves in various order through the sunlit hours. At night, her mind rested, as if the questions could somehow be the answers, and she thought no more about them. She would become sleepy, as if her clock was now the sun and the seasons, and she would sleep.

A sleep full of rooms, all of them empty save one.

Mr. Fleitman knocked on Lorelei's door at one o'clock sharp. Lorelei waited for a moment, perhaps testing him, perhaps giving herself this one last chance to decide. She was his judge, although it was a thin punishment she had to mete out. Finally, she opened the door, and said, "Hello, Mr. Fleitman. Come in, please."

He looked nervous and apprehensive as he stood in the doorway. But that lasted only an instant; and then he smiled and nodded and entered the apartment, pausing to look around, obviously aware of the light streaming in from the windows.

He did not correct her formal use of his name.

Perhaps he had heard what had gone on during the week. Perhaps he knew that he had been found out. Or perhaps that was all Lorelei's imagination.

"Would you care for some tea?" she asked. The table was, of course, prepared; had been prepared since this morning on the chance that he would come to the door . . . and that she would invite him in.

"Yes, that would be very nice," Mr. Fleitman said, and was about to seat himself in his usual place at the folding table when Lorelei impulsively asked him if he would rather take tea on the balcony, it would only take a moment to fix everything up.

And Lorelei knew then that she would never question him about his

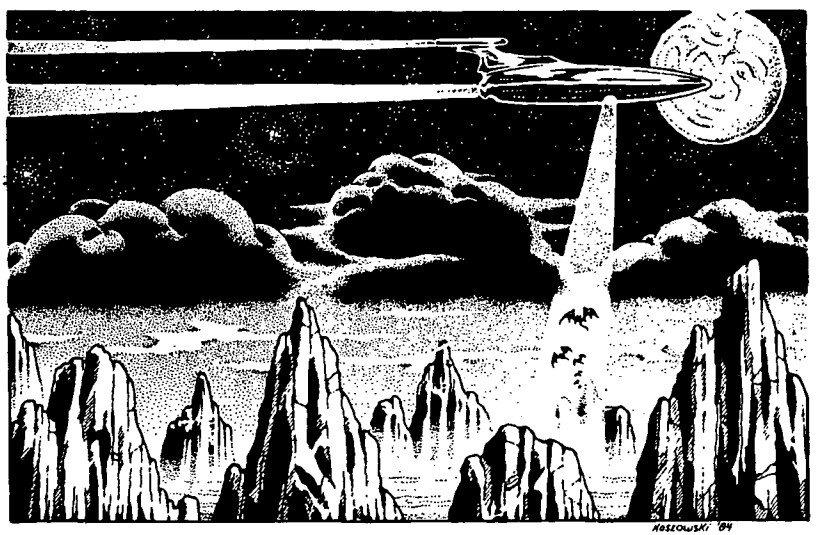
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

past. Other men could be his judge, but not her. Whatever he had been, whatever terrible things he might have done, were part of the dead, desolate country that was the past. And the past was like the cruel photographs of Auschwitz Lorelei had once seen in a book: ash and bones and hollow emptiness. She grieved for what she remembered about the holocaust, for its victims; and she also grieved for Mr. Fleitman, who had smiled at the thought of his own death, who carried the ash and bones and emptiness to her door. Who would forever have to carry all that he had done.

But there was little enough left to give and share.

It would be enough if she could just sit on the balcony and talk and laugh and sip tea . . . and share the life-giving, afternoon sun.

It was all there was left, and for these few Wednesday afternoon moments before God summoned her and Mr. Fleitman to His own judgment, it would be enough. ●



MOVING? If you want your subscription to *IAsfm* to keep up with you, send both your old address and your new one (and the ZIP codes for both, please!) to our subscription department: Box 1933, Marion OH 43306.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SUFFER THE CHILDREN

by Rick Wilber

As well as his science fiction sales to *Analog* and *Chrysalis*, Rick Wilber has sold mainstream short stories, poetry, and mystery plays to various markets. Mr. Wilber teaches creative writing and journalism at Florida Southern College in Lakeland, Florida, and is editor of the *Tampa Tribune*'s new quarterly fiction supplement.

art: Hank Jankus

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The grain silos of Troy rose into view above the fields of wheat as he limped along the crumbling two-lane blacktop toward town.

He was finally near another good site, then, and that helped ease the pain in his left leg, the one that hadn't worked right since the blast wave had caught him and thrown him hard against a pile of stacked railroad ties. That had been two months ago. A day-care center in Wisconsin.

School would be in session now, he figured, and that would help simplify things. There would be a lot of school-age children in a town like this; the small towns had come through the Collapse a lot better than the big cities. In a town like this he wouldn't have to go searching for any out-of-the-way day-care centers. All he'd have to do was find the right kind of school building, one that would come down quick and easy, and then he'd be able to roll up some numbers in a hurry, something that would *really* get some attention.

He looked up to gauge the time. About noon, maybe a little after. That was good, they'd all be tired and quiet after lunch and recess.

He limped on. He was sweating, a hard sun shining down through the clear September blue of the sky, the kind of sky he remembered from a distant childhood . . . a time long before he'd been forced into all this, long before the S'hudonni had come with their promises and their laws and their power. So much power!

It had all happened so fast. Like everyone else, he'd been bewildered by the speed with which everything had changed. Those great white ships, coming in with an offer too good to turn down. The doors to the universe opening wide. Trade with a hundred other worlds, a thousand! The wonder of that, the unimaginable wonder!

It would only take, the S'hudonni explained, a few small changes for Earth to earn its way to the stars.

A few small changes.

He thought of them, the changes. The district governors, the new currency, the new language—the S'hudonni way to peace and prosperity and that rainbow's end, that unlimited future.

And so America had died. The old way of life had died so fast. Three years, was it now? Four? And everything was gone. The might, the importance, the freedom, the strength—all of it gone.

He managed a small bitter smile, thinking about it. Pax S'hudonni, a world at peace, a prosperous, orderly world. Most people these days went for that, thinking that what they'd lost had been a small price to pay. But not everyone bought it. Not everyone.

The day was hot, the sun beating down hard on the black pavement, the heat uncut by Midwest haze for a change. Must be nearly a hundred. Heat can come late to southern Illinois.

He rubbed his arms. The blast that had nearly gotten him had singed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the hair on his arms. It had grown back now, but that had been much too close a call. He rubbed his arms in memory of that. Much too close. He'd learned his lesson from that one. He'd be more careful this time. He couldn't afford to die, not yet. There was still too much work to do. Painful work. Awful, necessary work.

He rounded a wide curve in the road and saw the outskirts of the town, no more than a mile or so ahead. Brick buildings, mostly one or two stories. Fine.

There was an old brick billboard up ahead, ten or twelve feet tall and hung with the faded emblems of the Kiwanis and the Moose and the Knights of Columbus. He slid his backpack off his shoulders and opened the side flap to take out the can of spray paint.

He'd come this way, on the old road, to avoid being seen on his way into town. The chance to paint the sign was an added bonus.

He sprayed "USA" on it first, quickly, as a reminder in red of what used to be. Then, beneath that, he sprayed "Suffer The Children." The can ran out as he reached the end, so that the last few letters were thin and spotty. "Suffer The Child," it almost seemed to read.

No matter. The basic message was clear, and people were starting to catch on. The children. It was all for them. Someone *had* to make it stop, someone had to do it.

He'd seen no one as he'd hurriedly painted. In fact, walking on, he didn't see anyone until he was right in town, on a residential street that was cooled and canopied by tall, old oaks.

An old man was moving slowly along the cracked concrete sidewalk. They said hello to one another cordially enough, he and the old man, but he thought that the old guy eyed him suspiciously. Small-town people were like that these days, insulated, protective.

He decided that he'd have to do it right away, then, in the next hour or two, before any more people had a chance to wonder who he was. He didn't like that, he didn't like to feel hurried once he got this close.

He stopped at the end of the street and sat down for a moment on a bus stop bench. The leg needed a moment's rest.

He looked back the way he'd come and saw how the oaks made a cool, dark tunnel right in the middle of the blazing sunlight.

Those oaks were old enough to have seen the glory of World War II, and they'd greeted the returning heroes then. And the heroes returning from Korea, and 'Nam and Nicaragua. All the returning heroes. All those brave young men.

And then had come the S'hudonni, promising riches. But no more heroes, no more wars. No more glory. Just profit. S'hudonni profit.

He squirmed a bit to get comfortable on the splintered wood. He could feel, against the small of his back, down where the bottom of the backpack

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pushed against him, the thin, rectangular hardness that was the S'hudonni device. He'd left the other one outside of town, buried where it would be safe.

A little present for the city of Troy, brought to town by a guy who looked pretty harmless. He smiled again at the thought of that. Pretty harmless.

Ironic, of course, that the devices were of S'hudonni make. Ironic, and fitting. This one today, the other in a month or so, somewhere five or six hundred miles away, and then he'd work his way home to get more.

So powerful an explosion from so small a thing. He felt the device against his back. About the size of a deck of cards. A magic deck of cards.

He didn't know how the group had gotten them. He didn't want to know. He had two left, that was all that mattered. That, and how well they worked.

The rubble, the smoke, the heat. The death. *That* was how well they worked. In Rhinelander. In Saginaw before that. In Akron before that.

Now this one, then one more, and then back home. He'd hide for a while there, get the leg taken care of, and then head out again. So much to do, so little time.

He rose to walk on, and the street sign caught his eye. He was standing at the corner of Jefferson Avenue and Hale Street. Very patriotic little town, Troy. Below the street names were two, newer signs. They also gave the names of the streets, but in S'hudonni script.

It would be best, the S'hudonni said, if all concerned would learn the language of interstellar commerce, of universal profit. Indigenous languages were nice, and could be retained, they said, but only those who could deal in S'hudonni could really expect to prosper.

That was why all the schools taught S'hudonni to all the children, so they could grow up to prosper under the enlightened rule of the S'hudonni Empire. He was angry with himself for being able to read the script. It was unavoidable, the S'hudonni influence. Unavoidable.

But that didn't mean he couldn't do something about it. He started walking again, watching for a school. It wasn't that big a town that he couldn't find what he wanted in a half-hour or so, he figured, and he was right. Soon he did find one, a perfect two-story red brick one.

"George P. Tillman Elementary" it said in Indiana limestone across the twin-doored entrance.

Air conditioners hummed in the windows of the school. Things were getting back to normal in small-town America. People had bought the new system; had forgotten some of the old hates, had forgiven the S'hudonni for all the chaos that had followed those first landings. Now there were air conditioners once again in the windows of the schools in towns like Troy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He shook his head slightly at seeing it. He knew what he'd find inside that building. It would be just as bad as the street signs. Worse. Much worse. The acceptance. The children.

In there they were being taught the new way, the S'hudonni way, with those S'hudonni teaching machines for the language and for the science and the math—and with nothing being taught by real teachers about how things had been, nothing being taught of everything that America had been, of everything that America had lost.

And the S'hudonni themselves; white, pasty-skinned, those porpoise-shaped bodies, those permanent damn smiles. There would be a few of *them* in there, too, running things. That was always how it worked. American kids, American teachers, but all of it run by three or four S'hudonni administrators.

They would live in the school building, the S'hudonni, that's how they always did it, in a few rooms converted for their use—damp, misty, clammy places, so that their precious skins wouldn't dry and crack.

They would have their own food in there, would lead their own strange lives—a little bit of S'hudon right here in Troy, Illinois, right here, where they could teach the children . . . always the children.

He slowly circled the building, looking it over closely. The S'hudonni would be in some rooms on the third floor, up on top of everyone else. The second floor would have just a few classrooms, the first floor maybe a small gym. The building would come down easy if he found the right spot in the basement.

He reached the front gate, found it open, and walked through it toward the building itself. Almost too easy. Security was lax when the S'hudonni ran things; everyone counted on them for protection. They'd learn.

Ten wide steps led up to the main doors. He climbed them, limping a bit, favoring his left leg.

He walked down the central hallway on the first floor. The building was wide open. He tried to look purposeful and parental, but no one stopped him, no one bothered.

He heard a teacher speaking. She was telling the children to put on the caps for a science lesson. "Relax," he heard her say. He looked in briefly as he walked by. Little blond-haired innocents, all in a row, putting on their wired metal caps for a lesson.

The teacher saw him. She was very pretty; blonde, too, like the kids. She smiled at him, and was about to speak when he smiled back, put up his hand to let her know he was just looking in for a second, and then walked on.

She didn't come after him; probably assumed he was a parent who'd just stopped by on the way to the office. He was lucky she'd been stupid; she could have been suspicious and ruined everything.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He found the stairs to the basement at the far end of the hallway and descended them, grimacing with the pain in his leg at every step.

His luck held. The building was heated by an old, coal-fired, gravity-fed furnace that had been converted to natural gas. The huge ducts still arced away to the floors above, providing the air flow, carrying the heat.

He took the device out and looked it over in the dim light that came from a high-set basement window. A push here, a pull, a slide to the right, and the time was set for twenty minutes. He planted the thing in the side water evaporator for the unlit furnace. Twenty minutes.

The same teacher was quiet as he walked by the same classroom on his way out. Probably had her own cap on, he thought. Learning her lessons. He smiled at the thought.

He walked right out, still unchallenged. He looked back once, from the main gate, glancing at his watch. Only five minutes had passed. Good, he wouldn't get caught by this blast. No nasty surprises.

He walked down the street for a couple of blocks, taking his time. He wanted to be near enough to make sure all went as it should, but not so near as to be suspicious. There was a certain delicacy to this kind of work that went unappreciated by most. He looked at his watch again as he walked. Five more minutes had passed. Another ten to go.

He came to a small park, fronting a pond. He walked in and then moved over to the idle merry-go-round to find a seat. Pushing with his good right leg, he sent the merry-go-round spinning, enjoying the sensation. There were five other people in the park. A mother and her two small children played in the sandbox. An elderly couple sat on the bench at the edge of the pond, feeding the ducks. No one looked his way. He looked again at his watch.

Seven minutes left, maybe less. He was never really certain, not to the exact second. S'hudonni time didn't always seem to work out the same as American time.

The children in the sandbox were building a castle while Mom watched. It wasn't too bad an effort, he thought, especially for children so young. Lucky for them they weren't a few years older.

Their mother looked up from their handiwork and saw him. She smiled.

"Hot day, isn't it?" she said, brushing back her hair. "I didn't want to bring them out in this heat, but they were just screaming at me to get outside for a bit. They love to play at building things, both of them."

He said nothing. The little girl looked a year or two older than the boy. Five and three, he guessed.

The boy's part of the castle collapsed suddenly, taking part of the girl's section with it.

"Tommy!" the girl said. "*Now* look what you've done!" She started back to work on the reconstruction.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Still speaking English, he noticed. Still innocent, at ages five and three. Still American.

It was difficult, it was painful, but he was doing the right thing. This showed it. It was hard, so hard, to see them die, to ask them to pay such a price, to suffer so for what others had done.

So hard. But there was a certain clarity that such violence brought, a certain clarity of vision, a certainty that what he was doing was right, very right. And the first such act, once committed, led inevitably to the second, and then—more easily—to the third . . .

Suffer the children.

He stood up from the merry-go-round and walked away from the sand castle, over toward the older couple. He wanted to be near them when it went off; they would better understand.

And he wanted people to understand. That was the whole reason for everything he did. So that people would understand.

He stood off to the side of the bench and watched the ducks stab at the thrown pieces of bread. Dumb creatures, those ducks, paddling around waiting for handouts. They'd be better off trying to make it on their own, better off without the largess of the older couple. What if the ducks got too used to the gifts and then the old couple didn't show? What if the bread fooled the ducks into trying to stick around through the winter, and then the pond froze over and the old couple stayed inside? That would be that, then, wouldn't it?

He heard a distant *whoomph!* and turned to face that way, to feel the explosion against his face. The dull rumble swelled into a roar, washing over him, and he felt again the sadness of it all, the necessity of it all.

The old couple rose from their bench, looking scared but saying nothing. The ducks scattered, a few of them taking to the air and flying hard.

He looked toward the sandbox, and saw the children shouting in fear as their mother gathered them to her, hugging them, crushing their castle to do it, kneeling on the towers and walls to reach them and hold them and keep them safe.

He nearly cried to see them, the children, safe with their mother. He wanted to go over and tell them that it would be all right, that everything would be fine, that he was doing it all for them.

Instead, he looked away from them, over toward the school, where a column of dark smoke was rising. He could hear the flames crackling, even from here.

It was too dangerous to stay any longer. Limping slightly, the leg hurting worse than ever for some reason, he headed out of the park, out of town, back to where he'd buried the other device. He sped up his pace, in spite of the pain.

He had a lot to do. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TAGS

art: J.K. Potter

by Robert Frazier

Over the years we've published numerous pieces of fascinating poetry by Robert Frazier. Last fall, two of his poetry collections, *Perception Barriers* (Berkeley Poets Workshop and Press) and *Co-Orbital Moons* (Ocean View Press), were published nearly simultaneously. Mr. Frazier tells us he is now concentrating primarily on prose writing. The following tale is his first to appear in *IAsfm*.

Looking crisp and spit-shined in a new green uniform, Corporal Sun Rollins slapped a handful of credits on the bar for two drinks and wove his way through the noisy crowd to Prouse's table. Rollins was peeved at the journalist for boasting that he'd seen more than his share of worlds like Merwin Three, more than a mere soldier ever saw. What did this smart boy *really* know? Rollins decided to turn Prouse on his ear.

"Care for a sundowner, on me?" Rollins asked with a poorly disguised sneer. "They taste like yesterday's piss."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Prouse looked unruffled, though Rollins noted how he fidgeted at the collar of his silk suitcoat and brushed at the fine black curls on the back of his black neck.

"Too bad," Prouse said casually, with an accepting nod. "You'd expect better in an exclusive officers' club."

"Son, we're *all* officers here. 'Cause there's only a thousand tags all total fightin' on Merwin Three."

Prouse swallowed his drink with a sputter. "A *thousand*?"

Rollins grinned. Sweet Jesus, the official contacts had probably told Prouse twenty thousand soldiers, maybe thirty.

"Can ya believe it?" Rollins said slowly in his Louisiana drawl. "Credit it to all this here *high*tech."

Rollins's face lit up, and he pushed the empty glasses away from him so that he could lean forward. His white-rimmed eyes and greasy blond hair reflected brightly on the tabletop.

"Picture *this*, Prouse." Rollins lowered his voice. "It's a hot night like tonight. Everythin' real quiet-like. I'm in my stiff. A good one. All hard-wired reflexes. Armored but light. Infrared eyes with blindfire for my heat-seekin' wrist rockets.

"Anyways, I'm leapin' through the muck, retros keepin' me dry, when I dump down in a nest of Proties. A few brave slugs fire wildly at me. The few that are left, that is. Within seconds, I've lofted in a couple rockets and started slingin' chucks, the napalm disks that make the Prots scream as they burn blue."

Rollins waited for that to sink in.

"Now, these aliens *get* me sometimes. KIA. Killed In Fuckin' Action, you better believe it. But it doesn't matter." Rollins cocked his head. "Ever see a tag, Prouse?"

"Sure," Prouse said. "It's the interface wafer they use to boot you into the android warrior."

"The stiff!" Rollins slammed his fist on the table. He was sloppy drunk now. "Get the term *right*, boy. It's *stiff*, not fuckin' 'android.' Besides, that ain't what tag hardware's really *for*. Nosir. It's for recoverin' us when we're dead meat."

"The persona is preserved as an electrical thumbprint."

"The *juice*, damn it! Get it right!"

Prouse wrote it down in big letters on his pad. J-U-I-C-E.

Rollins smirked. "Yeah! Ya see, the tag's a lesson that goes back to 'Nam. The public don't care what war *costs*. Shit no. They just don't like their boys *snuffed*." His eyes suddenly glazed over. "So they recover our tags and rejuice us to fight again."

A bomb flash lit the smoky depths of the club from outside, and a tremor shook the building. Rollins didn't care. He didn't move or flinch.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He was intent on Prouse's rigid, emotionless face.

"And we go back, again and again. . . ."

He was tiring now. Too many drinks were dulling his senses.

"Only, ya know what? There's a difference between feelin' immortal and not bein' able to *die*. Big fraggin' difference. We gotta wear tags now when we're back in our real bodies too." Rollins wobbled his neck around to let Prouse see the tag wafer on the occipital ridge at the base of his skull. "Too many of us have twigged out and had 'ac-*ci*-dents.' Too god-damn many."

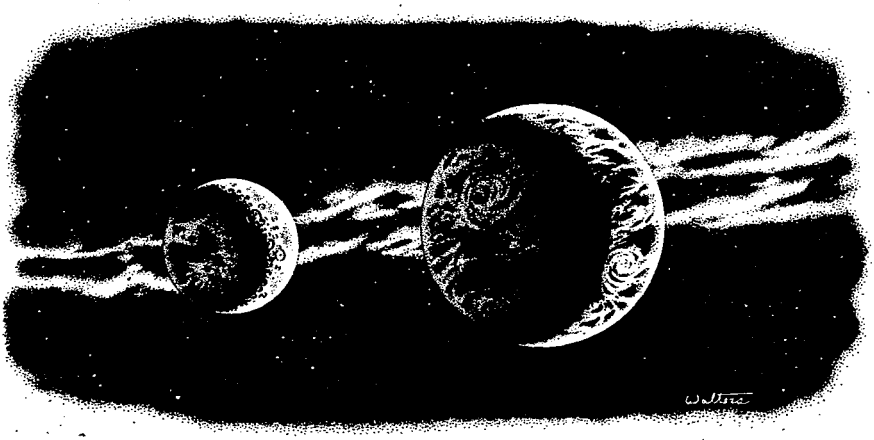
Rollins collapsed suddenly. His face smeared the table with sweat and his hairy arms knocked several glasses to the floor.

"They won't let us die, boy," he blubbered. "They won't let us *die*."

Prouse stared blankly at Rollins and shrugged. Another bomb flash lit the club. Prouse fingered the back of his hair and wondered if there was anything that Rollins could have told him that he didn't already know. He knew the *real* situation, better than Rollins could. Rollins had been stuck out here on Merwin Three for two years. In that time, the government had applied the lessons learned here to running things back home, a fresh approach, with war-tested innovations. The air filled with a thunderous whistle.

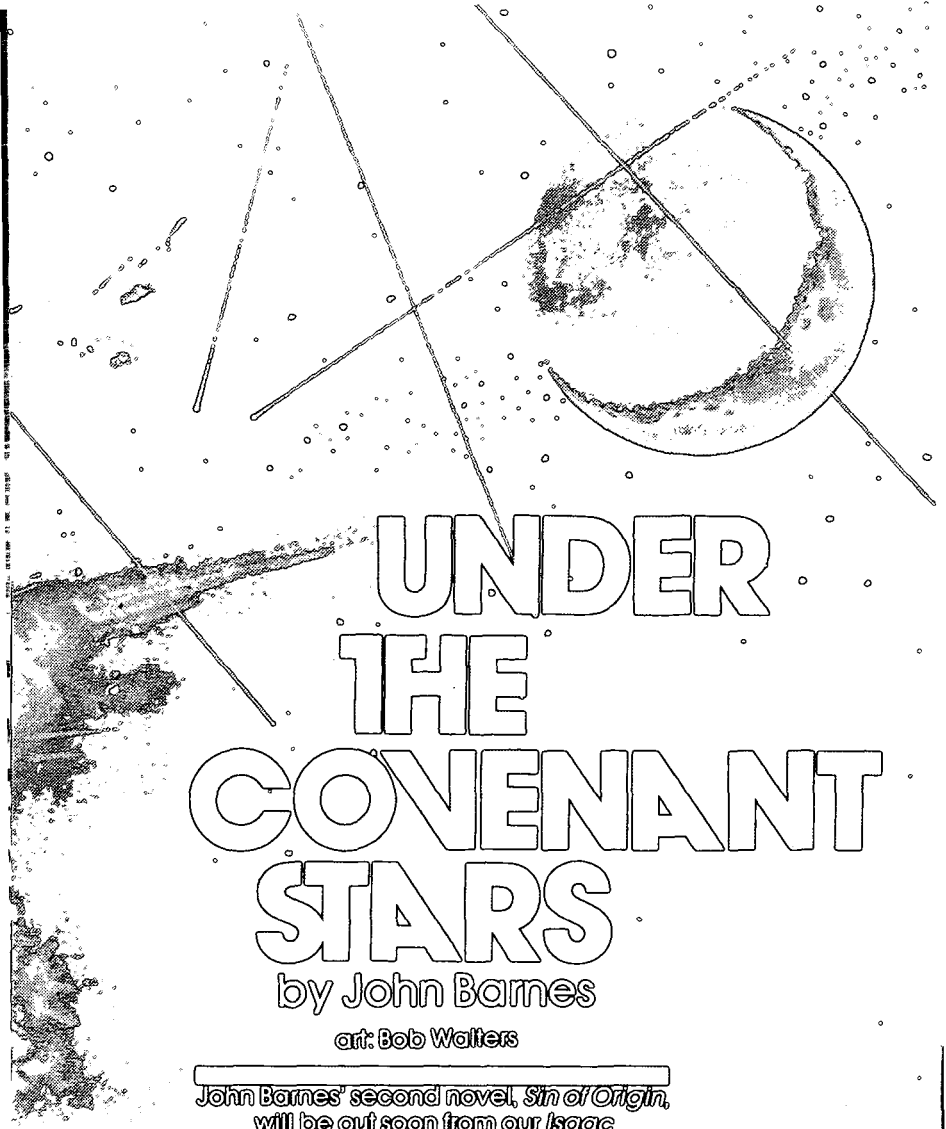
"Incoming!" someone shouted, but it didn't matter.

By this time tomorrow, Prouse thought, they'd have him interviewing another white-god hero like Rollins—or maybe even *this* Rollins—in an identical club, on an identical assignment. Then he went rigid, his last thoughts blanked and forever lost, and as the room flared white and the heat wave cooked him in his seat, Prouse drained back into his tag like the shrinking phospor dot at the center of a fading picture tube. ●



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



UNDER THE COVENANT STARS

by John Barnes

art: Bob Walters

John Barnes' second novel, *Sin of Origin*, will be out soon from our *Isaac Asimov Presents* book line. Mr. Barnes has a master's in political science and considers himself a hopeless news and statistics junkie. Perhaps his knowledge of today's politics is what makes his science fiction stories about tomorrow's world seem so sharply realistic.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Of course Brad, my brother—my half brother really but we never made that distinction—was famous, but when you're seven years old it doesn't occur to you that it's unusual to have a person in your family on the news every night, and to hear people talking about him even when they don't know who you are. So I never realized how strange it was that Bad always had time for me, even though I was seven and he was twenty-two. It didn't even surprise me that despite his schedule he had time to sit down in the basement and help me and Scott build a model. He just did it, just as Luella cleaned up the house, Mother went to her club meetings, and Dad went to the Senate.

Of course we were putting together a model of *Restoration.* Not one of those plastic kit models that they sold everywhere, either. Brad said that was too easy. You'd never learn to see the thing if you just stuck someone else's parts together.

We were working with cardboard and balsa and tissue paper and so on, trying to build it from the photos Brad had taken. Actually, Scott and I were watching Brad do it—our fingers weren't really up to the job—and asking him questions while he did it, but he gave us the impression that we were all building it together.

"And here," Brad said, "newly completed, is our crew compartment. Not much smaller than the real one."

Scott looked at him funny. Scott was two years older than I was, but he had a lot of trouble telling when Brad was kidding, maybe because his parents were such serious people.

Brad grinned at him. "Not really. The crew cabin is actually about the size of a small bathroom—but five guys will be in it." I knew that they had planned on four, but a Reverend was going to come along and they'd had to squeeze a seat in for him. I wasn't supposed to talk about that, even though Brad had complained about it bitterly at the dinner table.

"Does that bother you?" Scott asked.

"Not really. We'll only be in there for two days." Brad squeezed the trigger on the bondgun, and the crew compartment was welded into place. "And to tell you the truth, I'd go if they had to cut my arms and legs off to squeeze me in."

That reassured Scott; he smiled and said, "Can I tell you something? I want to go into space like you. I mean when I grow up."

Brad nodded and said, "There should be a lot of chances to do that by then. How about you, Nehemiah? Do you want to be an astronaut too?"

My face got hot and the inside corners of my eyes stung. That had not been a good question, and Brad would have known if he'd given it a moment's thought. I looked down. He reached over and lifted my chin, looking into my eyes for a moment. I knew he was sorry and had not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

meant to say it, so he could have let it pass, but instead he said, "You know, being afraid to get on a hijump once doesn't mean anything."

I didn't know what to say, so I stood there and didn't say anything. The year before, I had frozen getting onto a hijump to Europe and had to ride in the baby compartment. Brad couldn't think of what to say next either, so we all got busy with the model again. A little later, Dad came down and looked at the almost-completed model, pronouncing it "a good project and, unlike the real one, still under budget."

Scott had to go home for dinner, and it was almost time for ours. As we were going upstairs, Dad put an arm around Brad and whispered something in his ear; whatever it was, Brad didn't like it much and pulled a little away. I thought they would go off to talk about it privately, but just then Mother came home.

Her entrance was as big as always—big hug and kiss for Dad, same for me, and a peck on the cheek for Brad. Her body always stiffened when she did that, like she was trying not to touch Brad. That bothered me, and I asked him about it once, but he just said she was probably a little uncomfortable because she was only two years older than he was. I didn't see what difference that made, but it sounded like one of those grown-up answers that never make any sense anyway.

Luella, the servant, was an affy, and one of her little quirks was getting dinner done too early, so as usual, we all had to rush in to eat it in a hurry. Mother always muttered about there not being any good servants, but that was kind of stupid—most of my friends' parents had robots, which not only got the meal to the table when you wanted it, but could cook decently. Even at seven I had figured out that having a live servant, one of God's Afflicted, was purely a status matter and that Luella was here only to show the world that we could afford an affy on a live-in basis.

I shoveled down the beets, which were already a little cold but still the most tolerable things on the plate, and I listened. A lot of time Brad would talk about the mission preparations, or Dad would talk about who hated who in the Senate, or on the Space Committee or at USSA. I usually didn't understand much of it, but I tried to practice remembering it, because sometimes when I played with those people's children I could pick up something useful for Dad, the same way Mother heard things for him at the club.

Tonight, though, it didn't take any special effort to pay attention. Mother was not eating; she was clearly upset, but trying to draw her out never worked, so Brad and Dad made small talk. "You know the Trentons?" she asked abruptly, breaking into a joke Brad was telling.

The question was silly, but nobody pointed that out. The Trentons were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Scott's parents and our neighbors across the back yard. Everyone waited. Finally, she said, "Their name came up this afternoon."

Dad raised an eyebrow. "What is there about them that would draw any attention?"

"Martha's been doing some genealogy."

That was just scandalous enough to distract me for a moment. Martha was Mrs. Oldham, the wife of the Deputy Reverend General for DC, and for her to be linked to genies was really shocking—Mother had made Brad quit reading to me from the *Arabian Nights* because of the genies. But maybe grown-ups were different and they could get away with it. Or maybe the Trentons were in trouble because *they* had been dealing with genies.

"—thought I had made it clear that you need to keep those old busy-bodies away from the Project." Dad's voice was getting loud.

Mother got louder. "They aren't being 'busy-bodies.' They just want to see the Project succeed, the same as you do, the same as Father does." That was a bad sign. Whenever Mother mentioned Grandpa Hodge, they were getting close to a real fight. "And it isn't going to work without the Lord's help. If there's any trace of abomination—"

"Canadian ancestry is not an abomination." Dad was making his voice stay low. "We've talked about that. Esther, use your brain. You've got a good one. You've known Phil and Carol Trenton for six years, ever since they moved in behind us. Do you think they're doing anything—"

"It's not what they're doing or anything they've done. I like them. But if they're tainted then something has to be done." Mother sniffed hard—she was trying not to cry. "I report on these meetings to you. I never ask what you do with what I tell you. I even tell you everything about what Father says, and I never ask you what that's for. I'm just telling you what other people are saying. You said you wanted to know."

Then Dad was up and lumbering around the table to her, his big old belly making him awkward. He put his arms around her, whispering in her ear.

"No," she said softly. "But I'm all confused. Mother was there and she's been leaning on me about the Trentons all afternoon."

Dad nodded and kept holding her. "What else did they say at the meeting?" he asked.

I sat and ate quietly, and so did Brad. "They mentioned Nehemiah being around Scott."

Dad sighed. "So they can't even leave children alone." He put a finger on her mouth. "I know, I know, as the twig is bent and so forth. And we're going to end up with some badly bent twigs. I imagine they brought up Phil Trenton being a physicist."

Mother nodded, looking down at her plate.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Esther." Dad's voice was gentle. I sneaked a look at Brad, who seemed to be engrossed in eating his diced carrots. "I am not mad at you. You have been of tremendous help."

"That sounds like something a senator would say," she said, looking up.

He laughed a little, but it came out more like a sigh. "Yeah. I guess it does. But it's true anyway. I'm just mad because we're only weeks from first launch, and now this comes up. I'm sorry I took it out on you."

She nodded and took a big bite of turkey steak. She had to chew it for a while, but she finally got it bolted down. "I'm sorry too. I don't know if I can do anything to get them off this. I'll do what I can, but they're already mad because Carol never joined the Women's League. I'm afraid they're going to push this one, especially because of the physics thing."

Brad cleared his throat. "I have a degree in physics."

Mother looked at him and nodded. "I know. They don't mind that. It's just that—"

"Phil Trenton is the only GS-13 on the project who isn't a Reverend," Dad said. "He did a physics postdoc on his sabbatical a couple of years ago, when he had the chance to go to seminary. They haven't forgotten that, or forgiven it—they want their imprimatur everywhere on the project. Same reason we had to cut the fuel margin down to zilch so you could take along a Reverend."

Brad nodded and wiped his mouth. "I see."

Mother looked down at her plate. " 'Except that the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.' "

"Because the Lord gets the credit anyway," Dad said. There was a nasty challenge to his voice, and I was beginning to wonder how long it would be before they sent me upstairs. She sat with her hands folded in her lap, staring at her plate. "I don't know what we're going to do with Luella. This food is horrible."

"Maybe we'll all go out for a snack later," Dad said.

"Would you like to catch a movie, Nehemiah?" Brad asked.

"Sure." He got up and I followed him upstairs. We moved quickly because Mother didn't really approve of our supply of preRebirth movies upstairs. But tonight, trying to make peace, she would say nothing.

On the landing, I asked, "Brad, does Mother like Dad?"

"Oh, yeah. It would be easier for her if she didn't. I'm afraid they like each other a lot—that's what the problem is."

Often Brad made no more sense than any other grown-up, and this seemed to be one of those times. I sat down on the couch and Brad pulled out the old toy box, shifting the games on top to reveal the video cassettes underneath. I knew that Dad had had to marry Mother—it was some

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

deal he worked out with the Reverends, so that he could stay in the Senate after the ReBirth Election, a few years ago. I didn't really understand that either, because people told me he had won the election; they said it was so the Senate would seat him, whatever that meant. And then for some reason or other they had had me.

Brad was lining up the cassettes in a row to let me pick. I said, "Sometimes Dad upsets Mother a lot."

Brad nodded. "But then again, getting upset is good for her. She's changed a lot from the way she was when she was nineteen. You do have to give her credit for that." It didn't really sound like he was talking to *me* anymore.

I sat back and looked at the tapes. "That one," I said, pointing.

He grinned. "You know, there's only so many lives to a movie tape. When this thing plays its last time, it will be awfully hard to replace until the next time Dad or I go to United Europe."

"We can play something else."

"Aw, now, don't be that way. I guess it's been a bad night for everyone. I'd like to see it again myself. Let's put it on." As he was sliding it into the machine, he turned and said, "Scott said he wanted to be an astronaut."

I nodded vigorously. "He says that to me all the time."

"That poor kid." He switched the machine on and sat down next to me, draping an arm around my shoulders. For the next couple of hours, we were off with Luke Skywalker. We got most of the way into the second movie before it was time for bed.

The next day they let Luella tell me. Dad would have done it, but he had to catch a zipper back home to Kansas early that morning, and wouldn't be back until ten in the evening. Mother had gone to the station to see him off, and then directly to a prayer breakfast, so she had told Luella, who had carefully written it down in her strange, blocky printing. While I ate my cereal, Luella read it to me, slowly, carefully, testing each word as her finger tapped it, then repeating it firmly. "You *you* mommy *mommy* say *say* you *you* not *not* spose *spose* play *play* with *with* Scott *Scott* no *no* more *more*." I'd seen other families' affys do it just that way, so it must have been some effect of the schools they sent them to after the operation. Affys went in with all different problems but they all came out alike; I thought that was spooky, and said so to Brad once. He told me not to speak of it to other people— "The Reverends provided the operation and the schools," he said. "People wouldn't like to hear you saying that."

Since I wasn't supervised much, and Scott lived just across the back hedge, we continued to see each other. It wasn't even any extra trouble,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

really; it just meant we couldn't be in each other's houses. The yards were big, and there were hedges and bushes everywhere.

It turned out, to my surprise, that Scott *knew* he was a Canadian. He had just not been allowed to tell people who didn't know. "There's nothing wrong with it," he said. "That's what my pop says. But he says that not everyone thinks so, and we have to stay real quiet about it."

"They said in Sunday School you made the Barrier," I said. "That's what wrecked all of Canada."

He nodded. "It's what made the Covenant Stars."

"The what?" I asked. I had never heard of them.

"It's in the Bible."

Bible Study was my best subject in school. "It's not," I said.

"Bet."

"Bet what? My folks don't want me to gamble. It's not Christian."

"I'll show you," he said. He ran into his house. I sat under the bush and thought. Dad always said that when you attack someone else's beliefs, you don't give him a choice—he can't really be your friend anymore because he has to choose between you and what he knows is true. I resolved that I would just listen; Scott was my best friend, so God probably wasn't going to send him to Hell anyway. And besides, I really wanted to know what he was talking about.

He came flying back across the lawn, a Bible clutched in his hand. "Right here," he said, scooting next to me. "Right here in Genesis. 'This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.' "

"That's for the rainbow," I said. "From the Flood."

"There are others here," he said. "We mark them in our Bibles. 'They that kindle the fire shall make restitution.' See? And America and the Russians had to stay out of space all this time. And here's 'Thou has set the borders of the earth.' That's what we did."

That last one was in Psalm 74, which I had learned by heart. "Maybe," I said. "But in Sunday School they say this part is about the Canadians." I pointed to it. " 'They have cast fire into thy sanctuary'—that means heaven, which is the sky—'they have defiled by casting down the dwelling place of thy name to the ground.' That's about when the spaceship *America* got blown up." I was proud of myself; I knew the Bible a lot better than Scott did.

I had upset him, though, so I tried to change the subject and get him interested in a game. I was already feeling sorry for showing off; after all, if his parents were Canadians, they might have taught him all kinds

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of things wrong. He didn't want to play anything, but suddenly he brightened. "But what about the Covenant Stars?" he asked.

"I don't know what they are," I confessed.

"At night," he said. "You see them in the sky. What people call the Barrier. That's the sign of God's Covenant—'and your children shall not pass through fire.' "

"The shooting stars?"

"Yes!" He was very satisfied now. "Those are the sign that God won't let us blow ourselves up."

I knew about the Barrier, of course—out in the country, back home in Kansas, you'd still see a shooting star every four or five seconds. Dad said when he was little, right after the War, there were so many the light from them was like the light of the full moon, and it washed out the Milky Way. I had always thought they were pretty, even though I knew they were how the Canadians had denied America its destiny under God—I wasn't completely sure what a destiny was, but if God wanted us to have it the Canadians shouldn't have tried to stop Him. That they were hunted and persecuted simply proved God's curse was on them.

But Scott was my friend.

We played for a while longer that afternoon, but we parted early. I went upstairs to the third floor to see if Brad had come home. He seemed as likely an authority as anyone else—I thought I'd like whatever answer I'd get from him better than what I'd get from other adults, anyway.

He was sitting on his bed, leaning on the headboard with his legs spraddled out. I knocked on his open door and he looked up from the sheets of computer printout in his lap. "Hi. Are you busy?"

"Naw, this is a set of rules and regs for other people's jobs. Low priority." He dumped the printout on the floor. "Come on in and have a seat." I sat down on the foot of his bed. "You look like something's on your mind," he said.

"Um. Yeah. Brad, I was wondering because—you know, the stuff about the Canadians Mother and Dad were talking about a couple nights ago?"

He set the printout down carefully on the desk beside the bed, closing it up. "Sure. What about it?"

"Well, what did the Canadians *really* do?" He folded his arms and opened his mouth; I was afraid he would try to brush me off with the Sunday School version. "I mean, some people say what they did wasn't an abdomination—"

"Abomination?"

"Yeah. Some people say that really, they saved the world."

"Some people like Scott?"

"Um, like him, yeah."

"*Very much* like him. You need to be more careful. I can see that place

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

between the hedges from these windows. Luella hardly ever gets up here, but if Dad or your mother sees you they'll have to make you stop." I was taken a little aback; I was never sure whether Brad was one of us or one of the grown-ups, and this didn't make it one bit clearer. "Promise to be more careful?" he asked.

"Sure. I promise," I said. He nodded and didn't say anything, so I asked again, "What about the Canadians?"

"Are you old enough to keep a secret? Like your friend Scott did, until he was sure it was all right to tell you?"

I nodded.

"You're sure?" He sat up on his bed, leaning forward at me. "It would be real bad for me if someone found out I told you."

"I won't tell. I promise."

"Well, shit." He glanced at me; I'd never heard him swear before. "Yep, I swear and I corrupt little children and if I get half a chance I'm going up there to corrupt the rest of the universe. Sit up here next to me and I'll see if I can give it to you in simple terms." I slid in beside him.

"A long time ago, when Dad was younger than you are now, the two big countries in the world were the Soviet Union—the Russians—and the United States, and they didn't get along at all. They were racing against each other in space, to see who could be the first to get to the moon and the planets, and they were building weapons to fight each other on Earth.

"Do you know what a nuclear bomb is?"

"A great big one," I said. It was what my Sunday School teacher had told me. Besides, I had seen the Topeka Crater back in Kansas—Dad spoke at the Memorial Park there sometimes, on holidays and so forth—and I knew a nuclear bomb had done that.

"Good enough. Well, both sides had nuclear bombs on rockets, some rockets on land and some in submarines, and they had some bombs on airplanes too. All ready to go. And finally, one day, the War everyone had been afraid of came.

"Now everyone thought the submarines couldn't be found under the water, but that wasn't true. Special radar on the satellites could see all the way down to the ocean floor. Both sides thought only they knew how to do that—so they both thought they'd surprise the other side, and sink all the submarines before they could launch their missiles. And when the War started all the submarines on both sides were gone, first thing, and none of them got a single rocket off.

"But both sides were launching their missiles from land, too, and those were in fine shape. And if all of them had landed—instead of just the few that actually did—it would have been the end of the world.

"But what no one knew was that the Canadians had something up

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their sleeves. Since Canada lay between the US and the Soviet Union, they knew that the War would be especially bad for Canada, because the fallout—I guess you could say that's a kind of poison, Nehemiah—the fallout would drift onto them, and the Russians would bomb them because they were America's friend. So they had made a plan.

"They knew that all the rockets would have to pass through one big patch of sky. And they knew how to make nuclear bombs—though no one realized they had actually made them. They built great big nuclear bombs, and they had buried them deep in the ground, at the bottom of long shafts filled with—"

"What's a shaft?"

"Kind of a hole. Like the kind in an oil well. Mostly they drilled into the sides of mountains."

"So they drilled big holes and put the bombs at the bottom?"

"Actually, there were about twenty shafts leading down to every bomb, fanned out in a circle so that the junk would go into lots of different orbits. And each bomb was surrounded by tons of ice, and all the shafts were filled with a mixture of ice and junk."

"Junk?" I asked. "What kind of junk?"

"Almost anything you can think of," Brad said. "All ground up into little pieces no bigger than a marble. Spools of old electrical cable. Broken up concrete. Gravel. Blast furnace slag. Broken glass. Old cars. Sand. The kind of little glass marbles they make Fiberglass out of. Nails and screws and plumbing supplies. They didn't want the world to know about their trick, so they couldn't use too much of any one thing for fear someone would notice. They mixed all that with ice and put it in those shafts.

"When the War started, they set off the bombs—and all those shafts worked just like great big guns. The ice protected the junk for just the seconds it needed to get through the atmosphere, and then broke up from the heat and the strain. The junk scattered every which way, into all kinds of orbits, all criss-crossing through the part of space the rockets needed to go through. The Canadians set off two hundred of those bombs. That put five billion tons of stuff into orbit, all in only about twenty minutes."

He leaned back and looked at the ceiling. "And you know what happened?"

"It stopped the rockets."

"It sure did! Battered them to pieces. The Canadians had figured they wanted to hit everything an average of six times per square meter. That meant a few bombs got through intact and went off—like Topeka and El Paso and Minot—but most of them were too torn up to do any harm. Either they burned up from holes in their heat shielding, or the control circuits were smashed, or they were just too broken up to work. So only

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

forty bombs went off in the whole world, and only nine of those on cities—the rest mostly blew up empty silos.

"The American President and the Soviet Premier didn't know what to do. The missiles they had in reserve were useless. The bombers were on the way, but it would be hours before they got there, and now that they were having time to think, they found out how scared they really were and didn't want to go through with it. So they worked out a deal, and brought their bombers back home, and signed a peace treaty. And they haven't come close to fighting since."

"So the Canadians did save the world." I was amazed. "Why does everyone hate them?"

"Everyone doesn't. Some of us think it's a good thing they did." Brad sighed, and his arm squeezed me a little tighter. "But the junk they filled the sky with made it impossible to send anything into space. Your grandfather—Dad's father, the one who died before you were born—remembered staying up all night to see men walk on the moon. Your father remembers when the men left for Mars, just before the War."

"That was the *America*, wasn't it? What happened to them?"

"They died up there, Nehemiah. When the War broke out they turned around and came back. Just to rematch orbits with Earth, in that unfavorable arrangement, took them months. But they thought they'd be able to think of a way to get down through the junk. They tried a lot of things, but nothing looked like it would work. When they finally ran out of time—supplies got low—they tried to just make it through on luck, but the junk tore their ship to pieces. Dad remembers seeing that—most of America did, because it was a clear night, and everyone went out to watch and pray, and the *America* made a huge fireball on re-entry. Even though the sky was lit up with shooting stars, brighter than the full moon, the *America*'s burn-up stood out in the sky. That was what really started the bitterness toward the Canadians, I think. People realized a whole set of dreams was canceled for at least fifty years. Sure, they were glad to be alive, but now that they were, they were walled into this little planet, just when they had all grown up thinking space was their future. And because of all that orbiting junk, no one has been to space ever since—until next month, when we're going."

I stared at him. "You're not going to die."

"I'm not planning on it." He looked straight into my eyes. "Every year more of the junk comes back down and burns up in the atmosphere. Less than six percent of it is left now."

I told him what Scott had said about the Covenant Stars.

"That's what the Diaspora Canadians believe," he said. "Or their church does anyway. There might be a little truth in it. The world's a lot better equipped for the space age now than it was then. We've got a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

UN that can really keep the peace out there now. Without a big arms race we have more money and scientific talent to apply to the problem. And because we spent twenty years designing, we know the ships are about as good as they can be."

"Why does the junk come down?" I asked.

"Well, every time a piece passes close to the Earth, it loses speed from passing through the upper atmosphere, and drops into a little lower orbit. When they get low enough they fall all the way into the atmosphere and burn up. And once they burn up they're no danger to anyone, of course." He leaned back against the headboard, looking up at the ceiling. "When I was your age you'd still see thousands every hour. But now so many have come down that it's safe to go up again. And that's why *Restoration* is going to fly next month."

"But some of it's still up there?" I had to know.

"Some. Not enough to be dangerous."

"Why don't they hit the hijumps?" I asked.

"Because the hijumps go up only forty or fifty miles. That's why they have to take hops—like remember we touched at Greenland?—instead of just one clean shot. Nowadays, they probably could just jump the whole way—the odds are really good they wouldn't get hit—but just to be on the safe side they stay low." He looked at me intently. "Was the Barrier what you were afraid of last year?"

I shook my head. I still hated to think about that. It had really just been excitement and tension; I had been so afraid of panicking that I had worked myself into a panic. But I couldn't tell that to Brad. "I don't know. Dad said we're going to take the hijump to see you land in Australia. I'm going to ride up front with the grownups this time."

He gave me a reassuring squeeze. "Good man."

He thought I was being brave, and I wasn't really, so I changed the subject by asking the first question that came to mind. "What if some of the junk hits you?"

"The odds are it won't."

"Well, what if it does?" I was old enough to know a half-truth when I heard it.

He smiled at me. "The ship is armored against the smaller pieces, and it's built so one hit won't be able to cripple it. Besides, for most of the trip we'll be above the Barrier—we just have to go through it going up and coming down." He noticed I hadn't smiled back, so he tried again. "To make it even safer, we'll be going through a low-density spot, taking off from Malvinas Station, and coming back through the same spot when it passes over Australia. We'll be okay."

"But what if you do get hit real hard, by some big ones?"

He sighed and held me close. "Well, if that happens, the ship might

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be destroyed and I might be killed. I'm sorry, Nehemiah, but that's what it would probably be."

I suddenly noticed my thumb was in my mouth, which was just for babies, so I pulled it out. But then I had to hang onto him real hard for a while. He didn't seem to mind.

"Why are you going?" I finally managed to ask. "You could stay here and be safe."

He sighed. "This will teach me to start answering questions. You never know where they might lead. I could say I just want to be the first. That's true, but it's not the reason. Or maybe because I always won every contest I tried, and I want to try a bigger one.

"But really—well, it's like this. There's only so much to go around on Earth. Anything one person gets is something everyone else doesn't get. So we all try to get our hands on stuff and keep it away from other people, and we stick our noses in each others' business all the time."

"Like the Reverends?" I asked.

He laughed; it was good to hear that, and I hugged in close to his chest to listen. His armpit was sweating as if he'd been running. "Yes," he said, "like them, and—"

"Don't say so."

"Exactly. I can tell you have the family brains." He riffled through my hair with his fingers. "Yes, like the Reverends. And like all the rest of us squabbling down on this mudball trying to get the little good stuff there is. But out there—out there is everything we need. So people can grow up not fighting each other."

"Will we still be able to play Army?" I asked. I had been frightened at first, but if Brad said it was all right, it was. Besides, I had been paying close attention for longer than I was used to, and I was getting tired.

"I guess so. If you want," he said. "But it will be just play. No one will get killed."

That sounded good to me. I said bye and headed for my room; I was working on building a model all by myself, and I wanted to get it done to show Brad before he left.

There was something a little funny to my right. I thought for a moment and then realized that the door into an unused bedroom had been closed when I had gone by before—or so I thought.

It didn't matter one way or the other, so I let it go, but it kept nagging at me all the way down the hall. Finally, just before I'd have gone down the stairs to my room, I turned around.

I saw Mother quietly emerge from the unused room and slip into Brad's room.

For a moment I thought I'd dreamed it. But I found myself slowly,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

carefully, avoiding all the loose, creaky boards, creeping on tip-toe back toward Brad's room. As I got nearer, I went slower, until finally I was taking long, careful balancing steps just barely touching my foot to the floor, then slowly shifting my weight and repeating the process. At last I reached the door Mother had come from. By now I could hear voices—they were arguing. I slipped into the unused bedroom and pressed my ear to the wall to hear clearly.

"—to tell a child a thing like that!"

"Well," Brad said softly, "it *is* true."

She made an ugly, barking noise. "All facts, no truth. You didn't even mention God."

"I'm sorry. Was he Canadian?"

"Don't blaspheme. You made no mention of Revelations."

"What the hell does that have to do with World War III?"

"If you'd come to Sunday School, you might know!" I could hear that straining squeak that got into her voice when she was about to cry.

There was a long silence. I pictured Brad staring out the window. "Esther, I'm sorry if I've offended you. When he asked me for the truth, how could I tell him anything except what I thought was true? Dammit, I love the kid too."

"Please don't swear." I heard her sit down on the edge of the bed. "Brad, I try so hard but I just can't take this. You all act like you're giving me a big chance to grow out of my faith. And half the time the world really looks that way to me, anymore. But I believe what I believe, and I feel what I feel, and Nehemiah is my son. He should be given a chance to believe what I believe. He's mine."

There was a very long silence. "What do you want me to tell him?"

"The damage is done. I'll tell him about God's Mark on the Canadians, and the Fifty Years Penitence, and so forth, and show him the passages in Revelations. But it won't do much good now. You've given him your tight little smug everyday commonsense story, and that's what he'll believe. You are robbing that boy of the chance for faith."

Brad sighed again, loudly. "Esther, if telling the truth as I see it is going to keep Nehemiah away from God, then frankly it's a pretty lousy God."

"Oh, *The Truth!* How wonderful! That's why you told him you might get blown to pieces up there!" She sobbed, a sharp, wet, painful gasp. I could hear Brad shifting around, probably trying to get a hand onto her shoulder. "You know he worships you! You couldn't even remind him that God will be watching over you, or that nothing will happen with a Reverend aboard. You had to fill his mind with all this doubt and scare him half to death for nothing. What was that, the truth? Or just showing off?" I pulled back from the wall, not wanting to hear more, but by now

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they were both so loud I could hear perfectly anyway. I thought of leaving but I was afraid they might see me, since I hadn't heard Brad's door close.

"Esther, I'm sorry—"

"You show off all the time! You walk down the hall from the shower with just a towel on. What kind of sight is that for a Christian home? If Father knew, he'd *vomit.* Do you realize that could make Nehemiah start thinking about men—lusting for them? Are you trying to turn the boy into an abomination, just to show off all your hair and muscles? And now you pretend you might get blown up, just so he can see how brave you are. Don't touch me! I don't care if you're sorry—"

"Esther, I'm really trying to—"

"I don't care." She was crying harder, sharp painful hiccups breaking in among her words. "I can't live like this. You and your father always insulting the faith I was raised in. You act like my father was a witch doctor or something. And he acts like you're devils! Where does that leave *me*?"

There was a scraping noise that must have been Brad getting her a tissue, and then Mother blew her nose fiercely. "My father always says I love my family more than I love Jesus. And he's right about me. I can't help it. . . ."

"We love you too," Brad said. There was something funny in his voice. "Exactly as you are. Really."

"Bullshit. You won't even try. Either of you." She walked out into the hall; I pressed myself against the wall, afraid she'd come in. "I'm sorry I bothered you." She slammed his door and ran. A moment later she clattered down the stairs.

I waited to be sure Brad wasn't coming out, then crept down the hall and downstairs to my bedroom. Later, when Mother came up to talk to me, I pretended to be asleep, and she didn't wake me.

The next day, when I slipped out to see Scott, I was very careful to meet him in close to the hedge on our side, where none of the windows on my house were visible. I had brought along the model of the F66 electrostatic lift fighter, which I had built all by myself. Brad had said it was a very professional job. I wanted Scott to admire the care with which I had built the tiny lifters and shaped the sleek wings and wimshurst housing, but he seemed preoccupied, watching a big lilac bush in his yard. Suddenly his father, Dr. Trenton, came around the bush and walked quickly over to where we were seated, sitting down between us on the damp grass.

I was too astonished to think of anything to do. I was half afraid that we would both be punished right there. Even though I knew that I was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

forbidden to see Scott, and not vice versa, Dr. Trenton was a responsible adult, and I knew that ultimately they were all allied against children.

Dr. Trenton smiled at me nicely, though, looking at me over his reading glasses which he seemed to have absentmindedly worn into the yard. "I have something that your father or your brother—or both of them—absolutely must see," he said. "Can I trust you to take it to one of them? After that you can come back and play with Scott."

"Take it right now?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Sure." It was a plain manila envelope, sealed at the top, with my father and brother's names written on it. I took it and ran into the house, past Luella who was contentedly washing a window, on up the stairs to the solar. On warm mornings, Brad and Dad liked to take coffee there.

"Hey, Nehemiah, what's the panic?" Brad asked.

I held out the envelope. Dad took it from me and opened it. "It's from Phil Trenton," he said. "Must have been an idea he got after he, um, had to leave us."

"Let's have a look," Brad said.

They pored over it, ignoring me. I thought of going back to play with Scott, but this seemed more interesting.

Scott yelled out in the yard. My first thought was that someone needed to shush him or we'd both be in trouble. I bolted down the stairs, almost toppling Luella—which also woke her up, so that she finally moved to the next window.

There was no one by the hedge. My model lay on the dry crumby soil under a bush, undamaged. That seemed more like something that Dr. Trenton had done—the care was more like him than like Scott.

I heard Scott wail; the sound was from up near his house. Leaving the model under the bush, I ran forward to the second hedge and crawled through the scrubby spot to the other side.

A police car was pulled up in the driveway. Two policemen were handcuffing Dr. Trenton, and I could hear the minister reading to him, "You have the right to the forgiveness of Jesus if you confess promptly. You have the right to avoid physical questioning by a prompt, full, and true confession . . ."

It was just like TV. Scott was crying, sometimes screaming, and his mother was holding him back from running to his father.

I ran as hard as I could. I was winded now—it was my third trip across a very big yard—but I kept myself going and staggered up the stairs past Luella and into the solar again. Dad and Brad were engrossed in the papers from Dr. Trenton, and didn't even look up. "Dr. Trenton," I gasped out. "The police . . . at his house—"

"An arrest?" Brad said, standing up.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I nodded. Brad started past me. "Hold it," Dad said. "I can handle this from here." He reached for the phone.

"GUS Central," he said to the autodialer. A moment later he spoke his code phrase, and then he was through to a placer. "This is about a Federal arrest in my area," he said. "They've got a man I want released to my custody immediately." He paused a moment. "Check your board. I'm Rank Thirty-One. I have that privilege . . . Yes, I'll be responsible for him." Another pause. "All right. His name is Dr. Philip Trenton . . . yes, I know he was arrested for attempting a contact with me. It will not be necessary to handcuff him. Just bring him by, unhurt. And drop all charges. . . . If you ask me again if I think something is wise, I guarantee, young man, you will be working a manual switchboard at the Point Barrow Meteorological Station for the next twenty years. Is that clear? Thank you. Have him brought by as soon as possible. No, he won't need to be fingerprinted either."

Mother was standing in the doorway by now, trying to get Dad's attention.

"What do you mean? . . . Look, is there an order for his release on the way, or is there not? Let me give you a hint. The right answer is 'yes, there is, *sir*'—*No!* Don't re-arrest him! I'll just—"

Mother had disappeared; in a moment she came back with Dr. Trenton. Dad looked up and made a face.

"One more time. Are the charges dropped? Good. Now don't touch anything, all right? I promise it's all okay." He listened for a moment, said "good" a couple of times, and hung up. "Phil, I'm sorry. Have a seat and we'll try to find you some coffee and a sweet roll. They must have been watching your house—I'll have surveillance pulled first thing. Did they hurt you?"

"Just my dignity. And they scared the hell out of my family."

Dad nodded, not looking up. His fingers drummed on the table. Mother came in again, this time with a fresh pot of coffee and some rolls. "Scott would like to see you," she said. "He's downstairs. I'll get some juice for both of you."

I went down to join Scott. He had brought my model in and was looking at it carefully. "I don't think it got hurt," he said. "When my pop saw the cops coming he put it under that bush to be out of the way. Then he just walked up to them—he wasn't scared or anything."

"Thanks for taking good care of it," I said, and sat down next to him. "That must have been really scary."

Scott nodded. "Pop just walked up and asked them what they wanted. They didn't even tell him—they just grabbed him and dragged him back to the car. I was real scared, crying and everything."

I reached out and touched his shoulder; Mother came in just then.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Scott, I've got apple juice and apple turnovers here. Do I remember that those are your favorites?"

"Sure," he said. They were my favorites too, so we each had a couple of turnovers.

"That really is a good model," he said. "It looks just like the pictures. I want to try that too—making one from scratch."

"It's not easy," I cautioned. "It took me forever to get the damn landing gear to look right." I was feeling very adult and important—after all, I had been the messenger in all this—and thought I might try swearing.

"Yeah," he said flatly.

I could tell he was jealous—I was two years younger than he was and he hadn't built anything like this yet. "What are you going to build?" I asked. "I bet it will be neat."

"I don't know. I was thinking maybe an antique plane, like some kind of a de Havilland."

"What's a de Havlahan?"

"De Havilland. They were a Canadian airplane maker back in the nineteen hundreds."

"Like World War One?" I asked. "All those wires and struts to put on it? Wow. That's going to be tough but I bet it will look great."

He nodded. I thought he might have been embarrassed by my having seen him crying. We went upstairs to play Journey of Abraham—we always liked that one because if you got the right dice rolls you could make the other guy's Abraham take a wrong turn into Sodom or Gomorrah and get blasted.

After a while Scott seemed more like himself; I guessed he had gotten over his fright and embarrassment. "Brad told me what you said about the Covenant Stars was true," I said, "or most of it. Except—" I whispered—"I don't think he believes in God."

"Really?" Scott said. His eyes were big; we were both enjoying being wicked today, with the rules collapsing around us. "Does he think things just happen? Pop said some people think things just happen."

"I think so," I said, solemnly, since I didn't have any idea. We went back to the game.

"Die roll is a five," I said. "God said to Abraham, take Isaac up onto the mountain—and *tickle* him!"

Scott giggled and rolled his die. "Abraham obeys. He stays up there with Isaac, tickling him. They come down with the tablet of the Ten Hee-hee's." Now I giggled too; for a moment we were both helpless, but Scott got his composure back enough to squeak, "And because he obeyed, he gets to go five squares forward." He moved his Abraham that much closer to Canaan, and rolled again; it was his God roll, so if the number was higher than three he could give my Abraham a commandment. "Four."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He grinned at me. "God says to Abraham, journey into Canaan duck-walking backwards."

My roll came up even, so Abraham was disobedient. "He says no, I gotta take a leak, and he goes four spaces back toward Ur." Scott whooped with laughter, rolling on the floor. I could hardly keep from shaking with laughter myself. I rolled the die and got a six; I could make a covenant. "God says to Abraham: this is our covenant." A mad thought seized me; instantly I was choking with laughter, but I managed to gasp out, "God says if Abraham never farts again, chocolate chip cookies will fall from Heaven every day."

That did it. We were helpless with laughter, rolling around, tears running out of our eyes, unable even to breathe.

I looked up to see my grandfather, the Reverend Hodge.

For a moment, we just lay there frozen. He smiled just a little and sat down on the rug beside us.

"It sounds like you boys were having a lot of fun," he said.

"Um; no. Yes." I said.

"Oh, of course you were," he said. His liver-spotted plump hand extended onto my board and set Abraham back up. "It was very funny, and you were laughing."

I nodded a couple of times. I felt like I was going to throw up—if I didn't know exactly what was coming, I knew near enough.

"You know why it's so funny?" He waited expectantly. I stole a glance at Scott; he was looking down at the floor. I didn't say anything, so finally Grandpa said, "It's funny because—" he dropped his voice like a conspirator "—*God is a stuffed shirt.*" He sat back looking at us. "Isn't he? He's *terribly* pompous. Always telling people what to do. Thou shalt and thou shalt not all the time.

"And do you know what's fun to do with pompous people? We make fun of them. We pretend they say silly things. . . ." He sat and waited for me to look up. Eventually I couldn't help myself.

His eyes locked onto mine. "Don't we?"

I nodded, unable to look away. My eyes were starting to water a little already.

"But God is *not* pompous, Nehemiah. He only seems that way to people who don't understand Him. God is not mocked. If you think you can make fun of Him, then you don't understand Him, even though your grandfather is a Reverend and your father is a senator and you go to expensive private schools. No matter how much your parents love you. No matter how many friends you have."

I could feel the tears starting to run down my face. I was about to blubber.

"You do want to believe, don't you?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I nodded hard, miserably trying to keep from sobbing.

"You want Jesus to help you believe, don't you?"

"*Stop it.*" Mother was standing in the doorway. "Father, leave him alone."

"I'm just—"

"I know what you're doing. You used to do it to me." Her face was slack, her voice toneless; she looked and sounded dead. "Leave him alone. It's not that serious, and you aren't helping him."

"I think I am," he said firmly. "I think that you know that what this boy needs—"

"I don't know that," she said. "It's not true."

His voice stayed low and mild; he never raised it. "But, Esther," he said, "if you'll just ask Jesus to guide you, I think you'll see. Just open your heart—remember how we did that when you were a little girl—"

"Yes, I do remember." Her voice was completely flat. "Now get out of here."

He swallowed hard. "Surely. It's your house." He got up. "Be careful, though. Remember I love you and I don't want things to happen to you. That's why I came over when I heard that—"

"I know," she said. "Now go."

Grandpa went down the stairs without looking back. I noticed how small and old he was. "Nehemiah, come with me," Mother said. "Scott, if you'll just wait here. . . ."

I followed Mother down the hall, not sure what was going on. She led me into a spare bedroom and sat down on the bed. "Lie down on your stomach, across my lap," she said.

I did. Her wool skirt was rough against my face, and I could feel it absorbing the tears that were still there from when Grandpa had talked to me. I could feel her legs tense under me, and she sighed. "This is going to hurt."

Then she slapped me on the bottom, three times, fairly hard. It stung, though not very much. I was too surprised to be very upset.

"That," she said, "is for blasphemy, and for upsetting your grandfather. If you ever do that again, I will do this again. Is that clear?" She let me up off her lap. She didn't really sound very angry.

"Yes, ma'am," I agreed.

"Okay." She kissed me on the cheek. "Now it's all over. Go back and play." I stood there for a moment, getting my bearings. She laid a hand on my shoulder. "Nehemiah?"

"Yes, ma'am?" Until I got the new rules figured out, I wasn't taking any chances.

"Did that hurt?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A little bit," I said. It didn't seem like a good idea to lie just then, but I was hoping she wouldn't decide it hadn't worked and do it again.

"It was supposed to." She looked at me but seemed far away. "Nobody ever did that to me when I was little. Father just talked to me—you know, the way he was talking to you. I always thought I'd rather be spanked."

She seemed to feel bad, so I said I would rather be spanked too. It was probably true anyway. This seemed to take care of things, so I went back to play with Scott. Scott and Dr. Trenton stayed the rest of the day; Mrs. Trenton came over for dinner, too, which she and Mother cooked, giving Luella the night off. That meant not only the fun of having company, but good food for once. Everyone talked and laughed a lot, and Mother even had a couple of sips of wine and tried to learn to play bridge—that last was apparently *very* funny, from the way the adults were reacting, though Scott and I couldn't follow any of it.

It got pretty late before the Trentons went home. I think my parents had missed them. When they left, Dr. Trenton quietly said, "So you don't think there's anything to be done about it?"

Brad shook his head. "Anything we could do would hurt the Project worse than just taking the chance. I agree—we should fly the Putty Ball before sending up *Restoration*. But that's all under the bridge; we'll know soon enough anyway."

Dr. Trenton nodded. "Thank you for everything. We'll be in touch."

We all shook hands and hugged and kissed and everything, just as if they were going away forever instead of home around the block. When they were gone there was a strange quiet.

"Well, young man, it is definitely time for you to get to bed," Mother said.

"I'll tuck him in, if you're tired," Brad said.

They smiled at each other and agreed, and I was being whisked up the stairs before I had time to figure out whether I objected or not. Brad slung me up on his shoulder at the landing, like he did when I was little, and even though it was kind of babyish, it was fun and besides no one saw us.

As he helped me out of my shirt, I asked him, "What's the Putty Ball?"

"It's a kind of satellite we were going to send up, Nehemiah," he said. "Take off your shoes and socks." He turned to run water into the tub.

"Why didn't you?"

"Not enough money and nobody believed Doc Trenton. Except me and some other astronauts." He put his hand in the running water to check the temperature.

"I can take a bath by myself," I said.

"I know," he said. "Would you rather?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I considered. "Will you wash my back?"

"Sure."

"And tell me about the Putty Ball?"

"All right. Get undressed, then." He sat on the edge of the tub. "You know we've already sent up several satellites, just to make sure the radiation belts and so forth are where they're supposed to be."

"We saw that on TV in school," I said.

"Okay. Into the water, and let's make sure the soap hits the back of your neck and under your jaw this time." He helped me in. "We don't know as much as we'd like to about what went up there in the first place. And therefore we don't know how many pieces of glass and brick and so forth are still up there. Radar can only count the metal pieces and photography can only find the ones that come down. The only way we can even guess how much is up there is to figure there's some ratio between the numbers of metallic and non-metallic pieces—and the Canadians didn't record what all went down the holes so that ratio is just a guess itself. So we don't really *know* how much junk that doesn't show on radar is up there in the Barrier."

"Could there be a lot more than you thought?" I asked.

"There sure could," he said, soaping up my back, "and every piece moving many times as fast as a bullet. Doc Trenton thinks so, based on something called a spectral analysis of entry trails—never mind what that is or we'll be here all night."

He wet the cloth and rubbed my back firmly, working up a thick lather and rinsing it off thoroughly. "So what's the Putty Ball?" I asked.

"It was going to be a great big blob of a soft foam. It would all go up in a can, and then expand to maybe twenty meters across, surrounding the can. Then after it had been up for a few months, the can would poke a nozzle out through the foam and eject a second foam to cover the whole thing. The second foam would work as a heat shield; then a rocket nozzle would poke up and fire to slow the Putty Ball down, so the whole thing would tumble down out of space—because it wouldn't be very dense, it wouldn't land very hard, kind of like throwing a wad of paper off the roof. The idea was that we'd bring it back down, cut it apart, and see how much of what kind of stuff had gotten embedded in there. Then we'd know if Dr. Trenton was right or not."

"If he was right, would you still go?"

He held his hand out palm down, fingers spread, and waggled it from side to side.

"What was in the envelope?"

Brad shrugged. "More evidence that he's right. But even if he *is* right, there's still only about a one in a thousand chance of getting a serious hit while we cross the Barrier, let alone having anything go wrong from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it. It's just it's not one in ten thousand like we thought. Really, there's just as good a chance of something going wrong with the machine itself . . . and that's not much of a chance. Now don't worry anymore."

I leaned back in the warm water, letting him wash my chest and shoulders too. He had taken off his shirt to avoid getting water on it, and I was looking at his hairy chest and wondering how long it would be before I grew hair like that. I hoped it would be a long time; I thought it looked weird.

Mother put her head in. "Oop, sorry."

"No harm done," he said, shrugging into his shirt while she looked politely away. "What can I do for you?"

"You can accept my apology for being so rude the other day."

"Decent now," he said, ramming his shirt down into his trousers.

She smiled at him. "You could probably be in six overcoats and a sleeping bag and still not be quite decent."

"I'm afraid so. Well, anyway, the apology's accepted. We've all been on edge with everything going on."

Mother smiled. "Thank you. I'll sleep better for that." She stepped inside; she was in her long bathrobe. "Here's for being a sweetheart." She put her arm around his shoulders and kissed him firmly on the cheek. She stood back from him for a moment, an odd expression on her face.

He grinned, leaned forward, and kissed her cheek. She stood there, blushing, and said, "I know you've both always tried to be nice to me." I thought she might laugh or cry or something, but finally she just said goodnight and went upstairs to Dad's room.

I had finished scrubbing myself and rinsing, so Brad toweled me off, got me into my pajamas, and heard my prayers. As I was getting into bed, I said, "Do you think things just happen?"

"Some things. Depends."

That seemed like a reasonable answer. I thought I had a lot to think about, and would never get to sleep, but in fact I barely remember getting into bed before being completely out.

The next morning, while we were eating breakfast, there was a loud knock on the door. Not bothering to call Luella, Mother went to get it. When she opened the door, there were two policemen standing there. "Sorry to bother you, ma'am, but if you could—"

"Oh, come in, come in. We're just having breakfast. Would you like a cup of coffee?"

"Uh, actually we just needed to check—"

"Are you sure? We have caffeineless too, and it's chilly this morning."

Mother was dithering like an affy. I expected Dad to go out into the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

front room and straighten things out, but he sat at the breakfast table quietly reading the newspaper, and so did Brad.

"Um, actually ma'am, we have an electronic record that shows that passports for Mrs. Senator Caron, Bradley Washington Caron, and Nehemiah Grace-of-God Caron were used at Moody Hijump Port early this morning."

"Oh, well, that's silly. We're all right here."

"Well, that's just the thing," the officer who seemed to be in charge said. "We were wondering if by any chance the passports might have been stolen from this house."

With a little squeal, which I'd never heard her make before, Mother got up and thrashed around frantically in the bureau drawers. I knew how carefully they were organized, and could have found the passports myself—third drawer down, important personal papers, under "I" for international—so I couldn't imagine what she was doing. Eventually, she said, "Now, I don't know wherever they could have gotten to. Brad, could you come out and help me look?"

"Look for what?" Brad called, not moving or looking up from his paper.

"Our passports."

"Are we going somewhere?"

She came in and explained it to him, even though he'd been sitting there listening. When he finally understood—which took quite a while—Brad went out and looked everywhere she had already looked. It took twice as long because so much stuff was on the floor. Then he volunteered to go upstairs and check the dressers. He invited me to come along, and we had a great time opening all the dresser drawers, empty and full, and feeling around. I had figured out by then that the one thing we didn't want to do was find the passports, so I was careful to check all the drawers thoroughly at least twice. It took Mother and Brad the better part of an hour to agree that they couldn't find their passports.

By now Dad had gotten into it too. Dr. Trenton and his family had disappeared the night before—apparently they hadn't even gone home from our house. Someone showing family Consecrated Privileges Passports for Brad, Mother, and me had gotten tickets at the last minute onto a hijump bound for Brussels. It had gone through Greenland Touchpoint before anyone had known anything, and was now en route to Brussels. If the police could get a warrant to the UN Ballistic Transit Authority before the Trentons got through the gate, they could have the Trentons arrested and brought back, but if the Trentons got out of the port, Brussels was the capital of United Europe, which had no extradition treaty with America. "They'd probably give them asylum," the policeman added. "We have a warning that says they're Canadians—maybe even secretly Church of Canada."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I understood that in about five minutes, but Dad took quite a while to get it, and wouldn't let the police go till they made it clear to him. Then he wanted to know about whether he could be charged with any crime, and whether he would have trouble getting replacement passports—the answer to both questions was no, but it took him a long time to understand it. "I'm not at my best in the morning," he said. "Haven't had enough coffee yet. You gentlemen care to join me?"

"No thanks, sir. Would you mind signing a complaint form here, stating you have reason to believe that the Trentons stole the passports?"

"Well," Dad said. "There have been a lot of people in here since the last time I saw the passports. I wouldn't want to make a mistake."

"All you have to say is that you have probable cause to think—"

"Now, don't lecture me on the law, officer. I'm an old country lawyer. I know these things."

They argued about it for quite a while; it took longer because Dad kept losing the point of the argument. Finally, one of the cops said to the other, "The hijump will have grounded and unloaded by now. They only take an hour to cross the Atlantic."

The two of them left, after refusing another offer of coffee. It took a while to get all the jumbled stuff back into place, but nobody minded much. Everyone seemed to be very happy—except me; I was missing Scott already.

That afternoon, when Brad was bringing me home from a ball game, he bought a bunch of roses for Mother. She seemed really overwhelmed when he handed them to her. "What are these for?"

"Either a great lady or a leading lady," Brad said.

She giggled; she really sounded like a girl. "Let me get these into water."

A week later, Mother pressed three of the wilted roses in her Bible. I don't think she ever knew that I saw that.

When it finally came time to get on the hijump at San Diego, I wasn't really scared at all. Partly I was a year older, and mostly I was just too excited by all that had happened in the past week. We had watched *Restoration* lift off from Malvinas, and spoken to Brad over the USSA radio link several times. And like everyone else, we had seen the pictures on TV. Earth looked a lot like it did in the new weather satellite photos of the last few years and in the old pictures from sixty years ago. But this was now—and people were seeing it with their own eyes.

I was on the hijump and strapped into my seat before I really knew what was happening. We took ten laps around the big circular track while the maglev brought us up to 650 mph, and then we were headed up the ramp, the strap-on engines thundering, and into the sky. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

acceleration shoved us deep into our seats for what seemed like a long time; then the roar stopped with a whump as the strap-ons separated, and we were floating in silence.

Although Mother had thought it might make my fear worse, I had insisted on the window seat, and now I was glad I had. Because of the slight air resistance, it wasn't quite free fall, but I still felt almost weightless. Through the window, I could see the black sky over the curve of the Earth and the circular whorls of clouds far below. I could almost pretend we were going all the way to orbit.

Then we were over and shooting downward, weight returning as wind resistance brought us below free-fall velocity, the tips of the wings glowing orange. There was a strange pressure under our feet, and a faint rumble. "That's the maneuvering engine cutting in," Dad said, but I had already figured it out. The computer brought the ship onto the laser beacon and aligned it. We skimmed in over the water, Honolulu flashing briefly below us, and settled onto the maglev track at Maui Touchpoint. The first hop had taken only half an hour track to track.

We glided silently, an inch or so above the track, into the transfer station. As we slowed to a stop, carts carrying fresh strap-ons rolled up; I watched the crew attach them and connect the cables. They certainly knew what they were doing—the whole thing only took a couple of minutes, and we glided out onto the acceleration track to circle up to speed again.

This time, right after the strap-ons separated, Dan leaned across and said "Look that way." He pointed out the window.

There were two white arcs down below us. As I watched, the lines of white ended in bright orange blossoms. "Engine recovery," Dad said. "Those are our strap-ons, parachuting into the ocean. There are ships down there that pick them up."

We went through the Tarawa Touchpoint in the same way, and finally glided onto the Brisbane track, less than two hours after leaving San Diego. After declaration, the hijump transferred tracks and moved over to the regular zipper line to cruise into the downtown. It seemed strange to be riding in a hijump as if it were a plain old zipper, like the one we transferred to in Brisbane Central.

As we headed into the desert—Dad said it was called the Outback—I realized that the sun was setting, not rising as I had first thought. "Yep," Dad said. "Just about halfway round the world. We've overtaken the sun."

The only fly in the ointment for me was that, exciting as all this was, Brad would certainly be able to top me anyway.

The control room at the landing field was neat too. Everyone was very busy, and Dad and Mother both told me not to bother anyone. I was too

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

interested in watching what the technicians were doing to do anything other than stare, anyway. Every so often I would get so excited that I'd go outside to the grandstand and jump around a little. The sky was quite dark now, and in the glare of the lights I couldn't see the stars—except for an occasional Covenant Star, flickering overhead. They reminded me that I still missed Scott, and I was getting cold all by myself out here, so I went back inside. It was almost time anyway—they had gone into their final orbit.

Everything was normal right up till they lost communication. Even then, no one worried at first because it was right on schedule. As Brad had explained to me, a re-entering spacecraft is surrounded by hot, ionized gas—while it lasts, it blocks radio completely.

But then the buzz of voices got louder, faster, and higher. The radar people didn't like what they were seeing; neither did anyone else. I kept hearing the word "tumbling"; somebody in one corner was chanting "Pull out pull out pull out" like it was a prayer. A fussy little man with a mustache who'd been guiding us around suddenly appeared and whisked us out onto the field. It was the wrong thing to do. In the black western sky out beyond the landing lights, in the terrible silence of shouting reporters and cameramen, a bright white streak had appeared. As we watched, the streak darkened to orange, like an incoming hijump, and then broke up as it turned red, scattering tiny lights that twinkled and sparkled much too much to be stars.

We stared at it until finally, mercifully, the glowing pieces of *Restoration* dimmed to invisibility. We sat down there, right on the runway, in what was supposed to be the reception area, and cried—all three of us. Behind us, the American MP's were seizing cameras and recorders. The Australian reporters wouldn't give theirs up, and it sounded like the Australian soldiers were coming in on their side; there was a lot of scuffling and shouting. I heard all that without thinking about it, just sitting there clinging to Dad and Mother.

Eventually a man came to ask for Senator Caron. Dad got up right away, wiping his eyes with the good handkerchief from his jacket pocket—I had never seen him use his good handkerchief for anything—and straightening his collar. I could see his muscles knot even through his suit, but he was under control, and he went in to talk to the reporters. Mother and I were guided to an old-fashioned ground car, the kind people drove for themselves with rubber tires, and the fussy little man drove us back to our room at the Landing Complex hotel. They gave us a bottle of sleeping pills, but we didn't take any right away. We just sat and waited for Dad. I fell asleep, sitting in a chair, my cheeks wet with tears and snot dribbling into my mouth. When I woke up, Dad was back. I didn't move, so they didn't know I could hear.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You don't know that," Mother said. "It didn't have to be the Barrier at all. Maybe there's a design flaw."

"It doesn't matter," Dad said. "The program is dead." He slammed a hand against the hotel room wall. It sounded like it hurt. "Esther, you can't know. Thirty years of my life. When my friends kept their honor and went to jail, I made a bargain just so I could stay and fight for this. And now my son . . . and it doesn't matter. We'll never build and launch another one, not in my lifetime. Other countries will go; we'll ride along after it's safe. I got a call from the staff in Washington—they say half the votes I used to count on are gone." He leaned forward, covering his eyes with his hands and rubbing hard.

"That bargain you made to stay in the Senate," she said. "Was it such a bad one?"

He sat up and put an arm around her. "That was the only good thing to come out of it," he said.

"That and Nehemiah," she corrected. She sighed. "I want you to know, when we get there I'm going to collapse. But for right now I can kind of hold together. I've already packed."

"Packed? We're not going back to Washington tonight."

"Right," she said. "We're going to Jakarta. And maybe eventually to Brussels. They can use somebody who knows a lot about the *Restoration* project."

He stared at her. "Defect?"

"That's the word. If we can catch the zipper within two hours, we can make the early morning hijump to Jakarta from Darwin. We don't dare call a car, but it's only about a mile and a half walk down the road, and the zipper station is automated. If we go out the back door it should be no problem—they're as confused as we are right now, and they won't be watching yet. Besides, once we're on the zipper we're in Australian territory."

I sat up slowly, but they didn't notice me. Mother looked sick, and Dad looked worse. "But we—" he began.

She sighed. "You used to be useful. The Reverends needed a space program to keep their image up, but not all of them were smart enough to know it. Father was smart enough, so he protected you to fight for it. Now that it's dead, he won't be able to. They'll retire him, but they'll jail you—if they don't declare you Afflicted. They don't need you anymore." She half-smiled, but there were tears in her eyes again. "But I do. And there are other space programs that need to know what you know."

"But defecting—"

She took his hand and put it on a suitcase handle. "Pick it up. We can sort things out on our way."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No." He glared at her, suddenly connecting in a way that he hadn't before. "I can't defect. I'm a senator. It's my country—"

"If you go back, you'll be a prisoner. Pick it up. Do you want this all to be for nothing?"

"That's not up to me. I have a duty to—"

"Who is it up to, then? God?" There was a strange tone in Mother's voice that I had never heard before. "Do you think Jehovah smote down *Restoration* because Brad mocked him? Or because the Reverend accidentally forgot a word in a prayer?"

He was staring at her.

"Do you?"

He shook his head.

"Well, neither do I. And if the people back home want to give up because of this—" she drew a long nervous breath "—*fuck* 'em. There are damn good people going into space everywhere. Those are the people you owe your loyalty to. Now are you going to go home, let them work on you until you confess to something, and then have them declare you Afflicted? Want a job cleaning the White House restrooms, trying to remember your own name? Or do you want to come with me and Nehemiah, and maybe get the human race back to space like you've been trying to do for thirty years?"

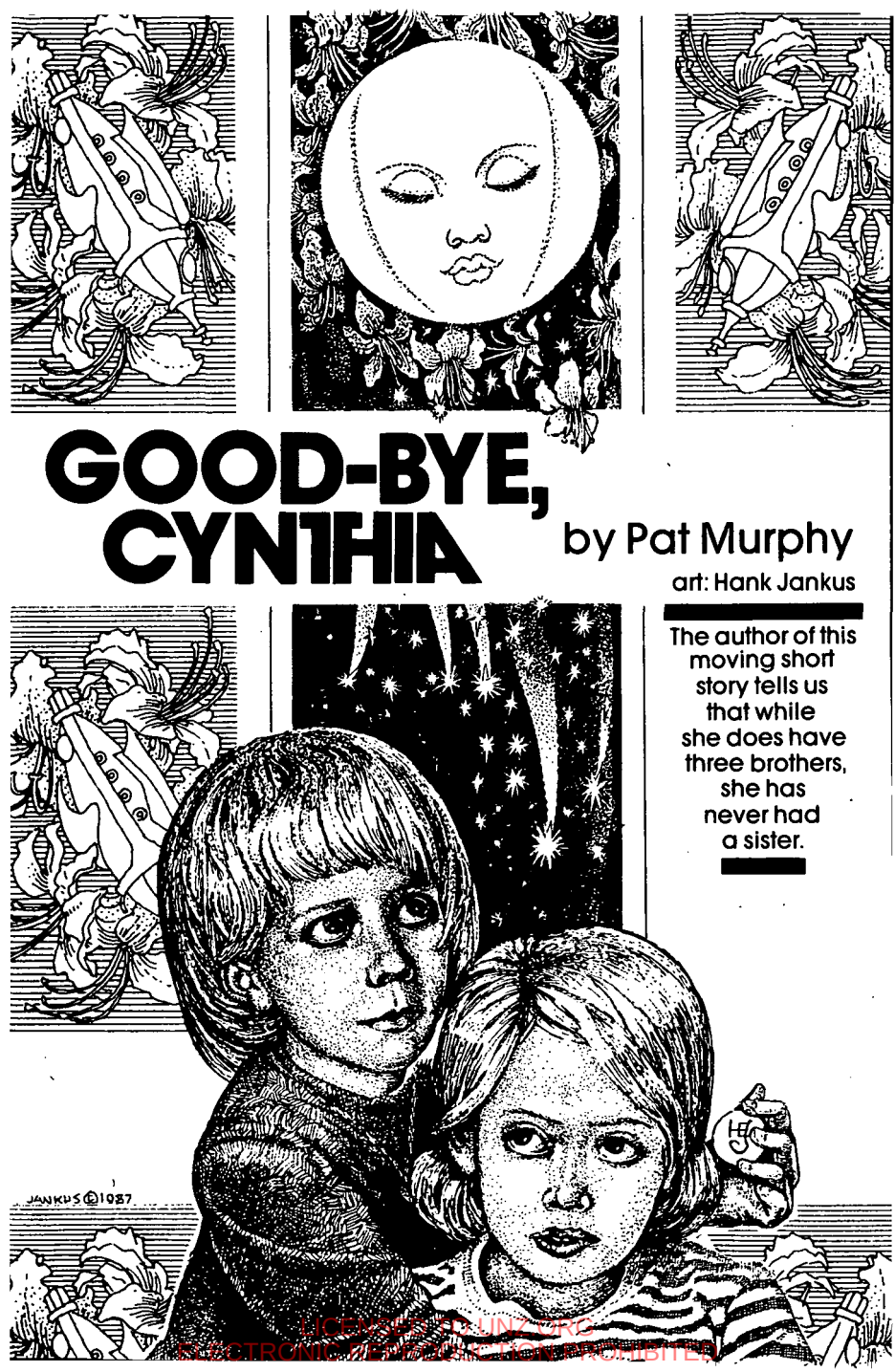
He sighed again, but he picked up the bag and his back was straightening. "We'll miss his memorial—we wouldn't dare to wait that long."

"Then we'll come up with a memorial of our own." Mother's hand strayed across the hotel room dresser, touching her Bible for a moment. She opened it, hesitating just a moment, then put it face down on the bed next to some loose clothing and a half-empty suitcase. "Looks more like we're planning to come back," she said. "Now let's go."

In a few minutes we were out a side door and walking through the cold desert night to the zipper station. "You'll need to be quiet," Dad said to me. "If you must say anything at all, whisper." I nodded and followed him and Mother, clutching my bag under my arm and holding the strap to my shoulder with my other hand. They were holding hands now and then, going quite slowly. I didn't have any trouble keeping up, but the icy dry air kept me gasping.

The landing field lights were off now, and above us there were endless stars. Every couple of breaths, a colored streak would tear across them, lasting perhaps as long as two of my steps. I thought of the Barrier coming down little by little till some night in the future when nobody would look up and remember; and of the sky becoming empty, as empty as I was, just trudging after my parents and putting one foot in front of the other, my clothes and things tugging at the strap in my hand. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



GOOD-BYE, CYNTHIA

by Pat Murphy

art: Hank Jankus

The author of this moving short story tells us that while she does have three brothers, she has never had a sister.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The closet is filled with boxes and the boxes are filled with things that I have almost forgotten. Two chunks of clear acrylic, molded to imitate quartz pebbles—my sister and I had stolen them from the bases that supported the "Cars of the Future" display at the 1965 New York World's Fair. Two troll dolls, still dressed in the tunics that my sister and I had sewn for them. Two aluminum medallions from the county fair engraved with our names: the inscription on the heart says Janet; the inscription on the four-leafed clover, Cynthia. Two charm bracelets that Aunt Mary brought us from Hawaii: the letters that dangle from mine spell out ALOHA; Cynthia's says HAWAII.

My mother comes up behind me and peers over my shoulder. "Oh," she says. "Your charm bracelets. How pretty. I'd almost forgotten them."

It is very convenient that the pronoun "you" is both singular and plural. Five years after Cynthia went away, my mother stopped mentioning her name or acknowledging that I had once had a sister. One day I came home from school to find that my mother had bought a new coverlet and bolsters for the twin bed that had been Cynthia's, converting it into a day bed that served as a couch. She had taken Cynthia's picture from the mantel and removed Cynthia's books from the bedroom shelves. Each year, on the frame of the kitchen door, Cynthia and I had marked off our heights in pencil; my mother had erased Cynthia's share of the marks. My mother had erased Cynthia.

I close my hand around the charm bracelets to hide them from my mother's view, but she has forgotten them already. My mother tries had to forget.

"I'd like you to sweep the dead leaves from the garage roof," she says. "If you sweep them off the roof, I can rake them up from the lawn."

I tuck the bracelets back into the shoebox, hiding them away. Unlike my mother, I don't want to forget.

When I was in first grade and Cynthia was in third grade, she told me stories about the lady from outer space. "She comes from planet X," Cynthia would say. "And she flies in a spaceship."

Cynthia knew constellations and stars on a first name basis. In the summer sky, she could find all the constellations: Cassiopeia, Scorpio, Draco, Sagittarius, and many more with names that seemed so exotic. She pointed out stars: Antares, the reddish heart of Scorpio; Polaris, the North Star. She knew where and when to look for falling stars and satellites. And she knew all about alien spaceships.

She had learned about the constellations and planets from the leader of her Girl Scout troop. Her information about spaceships had come from less reputable sources—the tabloid newspapers that my mother brought home from the supermarket, science fiction books from the library, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

late night TV movies. But the sources didn't matter; Cynthia believed in the space lady and I believed in Cynthia.

Whenever our parents argued, Cynthia told me stories about spaceships. Our parents' angry voices drifted up the stairs, like poisonous gas that filled the house and made breathing difficult. My mother's voice was high, with an edge like broken glass; my father's voice was a low intermittent roar, like a truck gunning its engine.

I don't remember what they were fighting about. Money, most likely. They always fought about money: money to fix the washing machine, money to pay for swimming lessons at the YMCA, money for new clothes, money for braces that Cynthia didn't want. Always money.

Cynthia spoke quickly, breathlessly, drowning out the voices. "Up on the moon, where the space lady lives, they don't have any money. Instead of money, they have rocks. And whenever anyone needs more rocks, they just go outside and get some. So everyone always has plenty."

"Where do they live?" I asked.

"In caves," she said.

"I wouldn't want to live in a cave."

"These are moon caves," she said. "Not like earth caves at all. They grow lots of plants to give off oxygen and there are flowers everywhere."

Sometimes, I dreamt of the space lady and her flower-filled caverns on the moon. In my dreams, her face was very much like my mother's face. She wore a long green dress covered with glittering sequins. Cynthia said that the space lady was coming to take us away to another planet. I wished that she would hurry.

My mother is cleaning the house before putting it up for sale. Ever since she and my father got divorced, I've been telling her that this house is just too big for one person. Finally, she has agreed that it is time to sell. I drove out from the city to help her, and for the past three days, I've been weeding the garden and mowing the lawn, fixing the back fence and knocking cobwebs from the rafters in the garage. The house looks better than it has in years.

I climb the ladder to the garage roof. The willow that grows beside the house has littered the wood shingles with leaves and fallen branches. As I sweep the debris into the rain gutter, the wooden shingles creak and snap underfoot. "Now don't fall," my mother calls from below. The window of my old bedroom lets out onto the garage roof. I peer in through the dirty glass and see my old bed, the open closet.

On warm summer nights, Cynthia and I used to slide the window open and slip silently out onto the splintery shingles. We would lie on the roof and watch the stars.

I remember watching a meteor shower one night in August. We counted

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

twenty-eight shooting stars, each one worth a wish. Each time a bright streak crossed the sky, I wished for a pony, but I didn't think I would really get one.

Cynthia told me that the falling stars weren't really stars at all. Each falling star was a rock falling down to earth and burning up in the atmosphere as it fell. "Except for some of them," she said. "Some of them are spaceships bringing people from other planets down to earth."

"There." I pointed out a meteor that left an especially brilliant trail. "I bet that one's a spaceship."

"Maybe," she said. "You might be right." We watched as a few more meteors left trails across the sky. "They can't land right here," she told me. "Too many people. They don't like landing where people can see them."

Cynthia claimed that the only way to get the space lady to land was to signal to her with a flashlight from the top of a big hill. Our house was on the edge of a development. Just behind us was a big hill where range cattle still grazed. Cynthia thought that this hill would be perfect for the space lady's landing. "You can come with me when I go to signal her," she told me graciously.

As I sweep away the leaves and debris, I can look from the garage roof and see the big hill. It is still free of houses: in an area prone to mudslides, the land was considered too steep for construction. The hillside looks a little mangy; new growth, watered by the early autumn rains, sprouts in irregular patches among last year's golden brown grass. Near the hilltop, a cluster of coast live oak trees provides a spot of shade. On the steepest slopes, I can see dusty brown streaks where bicycle-riding kids have worn trails through the vegetation.

I clean the rain gutters, dragging out matted tangles of leaves and branches. "That's great," my mother says as I finish the job. "Just great." She looks weary and a little frazzled, an expression that has become habitual over the years. She has always been an active woman, but now her energy seems somehow unhealthy, almost feverish, as if she continues to work only because her body will not allow her to rest. She holds the ladder steady as I climb down from the roof, and I notice her hand on the metal. Just below the skin, thick blue veins snake across the back of her hand. The skin is wrinkled and spotted. She has grown old, and her body betrays her.

"I need your help moving some things in the garage," she says. "I want to get out one of the steamer trunks so I can pack the linens inside it."

The trunk is nearly hidden beneath cardboard boxes, stacks of yellowing newspapers, paper bags filled with rags and scraps of cloth. With great effort, I move the boxes and extract the trunk, a heavy black chest large enough to hold a body or two.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'll clean it out later," my mother says, but as I stand there, she lifts the lid and pokes idly through the contents: old papers, books, clothing that's long since out of fashion. "Here," she says, pulling out a large book bound in dark green fabric. "You should take that to your father. It's his college yearbook."

I accept the yearbook reluctantly. I see my father rarely, and I'm not eager to drag this book around until the next time we get together for dinner. "Why don't you mail it to him?"

"I'm not mailing it," my mother says irritably. "I want nothing to do with him."

"All right, all right." They started divorce proceedings the year after I graduated from college. They had stayed together for the sake of the children, but it had never been a good marriage. In all my memories, I can't find a single moment of spontaneous affection between my mother and father: I can't remember a casual hug, a kiss, a joke. I remember only arguments: about money, about my father's drinking, about where to go on vacation, and then, while on vacation, about where to stay and what road to take. My father always drove and he would never stop to ask directions. Yet somehow, it would always be my mother's fault when we got lost. Little things—they argued incessantly about little things.

The arguments finally drove Cynthia out. That summer, we kept talking about going to the hill to signal for the space lady, but we always put it off. First, Cynthia wanted to wait until after her Girl Scout troop went for their overnight camping trip. Then I insisted we wait until after the Fourth of July, so we could watch the fireworks. Then we waited until the neighbor's cat had her kittens—I didn't want to miss that.

As the summer wore on, I found one excuse after another. I was hoping that we might make it to the beginning of school without having had a chance to climb the hill in the night. I didn't want to admit to Cynthia that I was scared: afraid of the dark, afraid of the teenage boys who rode their old bicycles around the hill all day and smoked cigarettes in the shelter of the oaks, afraid of the cows that grazed in the dying grass, afraid of the space lady herself. I hoped that autumn would come early and the weather would turn cold and wet. Even Cynthia would not insist on climbing the hill in the mud and the rain.

But one week before the first day of school, my parents had a fight that lasted for hours. We could not make out the words for the most part, but sometimes a phrase would penetrate the walls of our bedroom.

"You'll wake the children." My mother's voice, high and anxious.

"Damn the children." My father, a subterranean rumbling, blurred by drink.

More words, lost in the distance. My father was saying something about how stupid and impossible my mother was. My mother, desperate

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and shrill, was defending herself. I hid my head beneath the covers, but I could still hear their voices. I covered my ears, but even when I could not hear, I could feel the tension in the air. An invisible wire connected me to my parents. The wire carried messages, like the blurred voices that traveled along the string of a tin-can telephone. The sense was lost, but the feeling was conveyed: pain, anger, frustration, and fear. They weren't arguing about money; they were arguing about broken promises. The messages came through the floor, through the walls, and I could not escape.

Finally, I heard my father leave the house, start the car, and drive away. For now, the argument had ceased, but I knew that it wasn't really over. It did not end—it never ended. The anger was hidden beneath the ashes, ready to flare again when someone stirred the fire.

I heard my mother come upstairs. Quietly, she opened the door to our room. Both Cynthia and I pretended to be asleep, breathing softly and evenly, our eyes lightly closed. Through my eyelids, I could see the light from the open door, see my mother's shadow cross the room. She leaned over my bed and tucked the blanket under my chin. Then I heard her footsteps move away, heard the door close.

Several minutes later, Cynthia whispered to me. "Janet?"

I thought about pretending to be asleep, but decided that I wouldn't be able to fool Cynthia. "What?"

"I'm going up the hill tonight. You coming?"

"I can't," I said. "Don't go."

She didn't reply. I heard her getting dressed. The beam of her Girl Scout flashlight flickered across the walls as she searched for her sneakers. I wished that she would say something, but Cynthia wasn't about to dare me to do something I didn't want to do. She didn't call me chicken or tell me that I was stupid. "I wish you wouldn't go," I whispered.

"I've got to." She stood beside my bed, dressed in jeans and a T-shirt. She carried her sneakers in one hand and her flashlight in the other. "Goodbye," she said. "I'll say hello to the space lady for you. Promise you won't tell them where I've gone."

"I promise," I said. And she slipped out the door.

I imagined her walking down the stairway, stepping on the edge of each tread so that the boards wouldn't creak. As quietly as I could, I opened the bedroom window and climbed out on the garage roof. It was scary going out on the roof alone, but I wanted to wave to Cynthia. From the end of the driveway, she waved back.

I watched the sky for a while, waiting to see the spaceship land. I guess I must have fallen asleep. When I opened my eyes, the moon was down and I was soaked with dew. I crawled back inside, into my own bed.

In the morning, Cynthia did not come back. When my mother asked

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me where Cynthia was, I said I didn't know. I said she must have left while I was asleep. My mother called the police and they searched for her. There were pictures of Cynthia in the newspapers and flyers posted in the windows of the supermarket: "Have you seen this child? Missing: Cynthia Jacobs, Age 9." The flyers showed a solemn-eyed little girl in a Girl Scout uniform, staring steadily into the camera.

My parents did not fight as loudly after that, but the tension between them grew stronger. I felt it, and their silence did not fool me. I understood why Cynthia had gone. During dinner, my mother would talk to me and my father would talk to me, but they would never talk to each other. I felt torn and confused and I wished that I had gone with Cynthia.

My mother and I finish cleaning the garage and I spend some time going through the boxes in my closet, sorting my old possessions into three piles: one for the garbage, one for the Salvation Army, and the smallest one to take with me. It is late when my mother and I sit down to a dinner of hastily prepared hamburgers. We don't talk much over the meal; I don't have much to say to my family. So much was always left unspoken. But somehow, this night, I feel there are things that I must tell her.

"You know, looking though all that stuff in the closet reminded me of Cynthia," I say.

My mother gets a wary look, haunted around the eyes. She has pushed the memory of Cynthia away. She does not want to hear this, but I have to tell her. "I think that wherever Cynthia is now, she's happy," I say. "I really do." I don't tell her that I can still feel a connection with Cynthia; a tenuous thread binds us together. I know Cynthia is happy. I would feel it if she were sad.

Though my mother urges me to spend the night, I leave that evening. I tell her that I have things to do in the city and that I like to drive at night. Both excuses happen to be true. I take a box filled with souvenirs from the closet and I wave goodbye to my mother as I drive away.

A few blocks from the house, on a cul-de-sac where there are few streetlights, I park my car. A dog barks in a nearby house, and then falls silent. Crickets chirp in the grass and I can hear the rhythmic hiss of a lawn sprinkler in the distance. The air smells of wet grass, the aroma of the suburbs. From the car, I take a flashlight and a shoebox filled with things from the closet.

Climbing the hill is easier now than it was when I was a child. My flashlight beam picks out urban detritus on the grassy slope: a broken plastic water pistol, discarded in the weeds; a red reflector, fallen from someone's bicycle; a crumpled cigarette pack.

At the crest of the hill is a flat granite stone. I sit on the stone and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

unpack the box. One acrylic pebble, stolen from the World's Fair and more valuable because of the dishonesty required for its acquisition. One charm bracelet that says HAWAII. A medallion in the shape of a four-leafed clover. A troll doll with orange hair and green glass eyes, dressed in a clumsily stitched felt tunic. I place these things on the rock and lie down beside them, looking up at the stars.

I can pick out a few constellations: Scorpio, the Big Dipper, Draco. Staring at the stars and the sliver of a moon, I drowse off and dream of the shooting stars that fell when I was a child. Each one was so bright and magical; each one, a visitor from another world. One is brighter than the rest: it slashes across the darkness, leaving a blue-white streak that lingers in my eyes and makes me blink. When I open my eyes, my sister is with me.

Cynthia is wearing jeans and a T-shirt, and she is still just a kid. "You're the same age you were when you left," I say.

She explains that the space lady's ship travels faster than light. Cynthia has been all over the galaxy and yet she is still just a little over ten years old. She has remained still while the rest of us moved on, frozen in time like an insect in amber.

"I brought some things for you," I say. "I found them in the closet back home."

She smiles at the collection on the stone beside me, then picks up the acrylic pebble and rolls it from hand to hand. "Moon rocks," she said. "That's what I thought these were. I know better now." She sets it back down on the stone. "You keep them. I don't need this stuff where I am. Keep it for me."

"Where have you been?" I ask her, and she tells me about the caverns on the moon, about colonies on other planets, about distant stars. She says that she named a constellation after me, but it's only visible from a planet orbiting Vega.

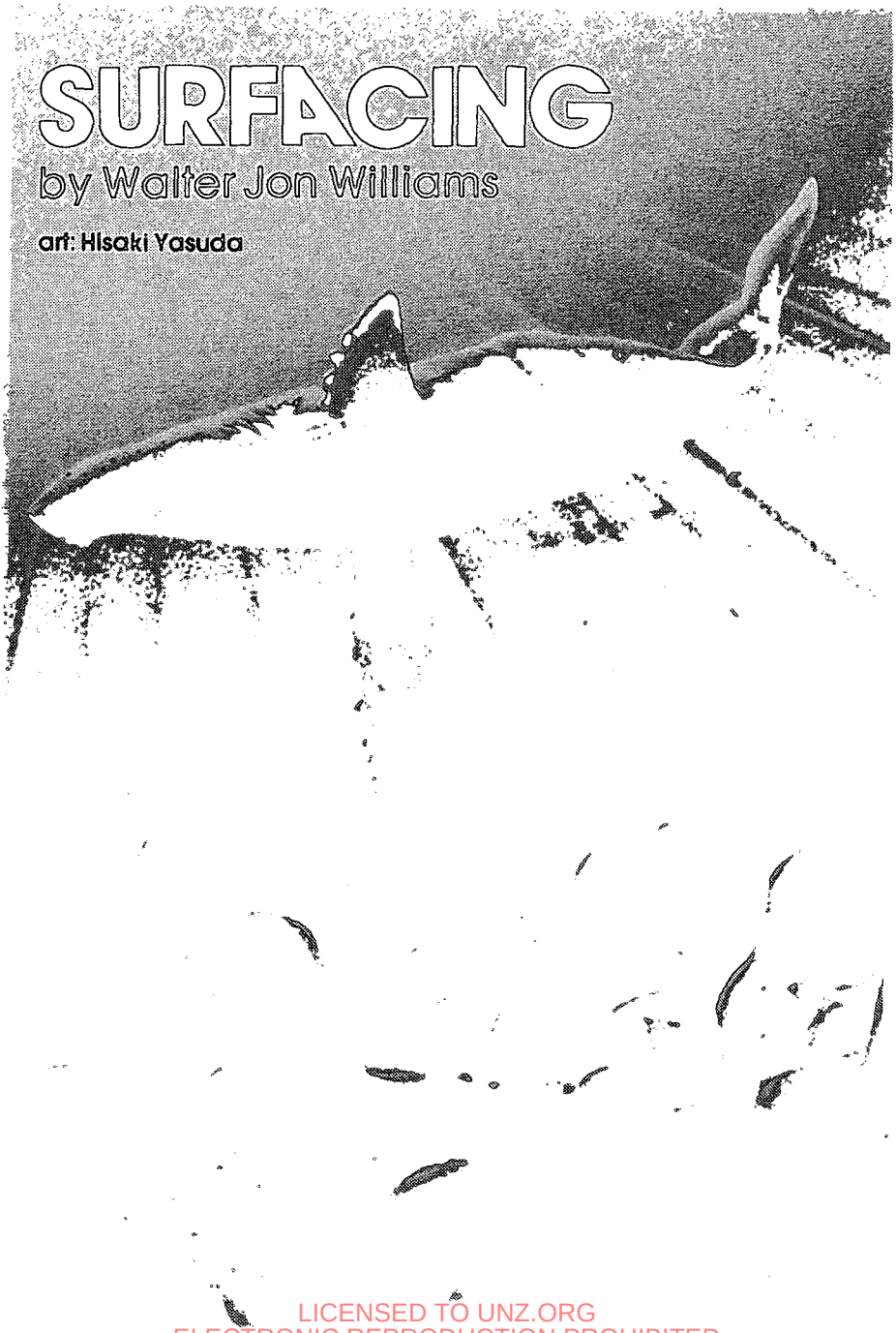
She says that I can come with her when she goes, but she says it sadly, as if she knows my answer before I speak.

"Mom thinks you're dead," I tell her, and she nods. "I can't go," I say. "But I'm glad you're happy. I'm really glad."

We sit together for a while. I put my arm around her shoulders and she seems so small and thin. My big sister Cynthia, just a little kid now.

I wake just before sunrise. My back is stiff from lying on the rock; my clothes are wet with dew. I gather up the bracelet, the pebble, the medallion, and the troll doll, and I put them back in the shoebox. I walk down the hill and the light of the rising sun brings tears to my eyes. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The author's last story to appear in *IAsfm* was the stunning novelette "Dinosaurs" (June 1987). He returns to our pages with another powerful science fiction tale.

There was an alien on the surface of the planet. A Kyklops had teleported into Overlook Station, and then flown down on the shuttle. Since, unlike humans, it could teleport without apparatus, presumably it took the shuttle for the ride. The Kyklops wore a human body, controlled through an *n*-dimensional interface, and took its pleasures in the human fashion.

The Kyklops expressed an interest in Anthony's work, but Anthony avoided it: he stayed at sea and listened to aliens of another kind.

Anthony wasn't interested in meeting aliens who knew more than he did.

The boat drifted in a cold current and listened to the cries of the sea. A tall grey swell was rolling in from the southwest, crossing with a wind-driven easterly chop. The boat tossed, caught in the confusion of wave patterns.

It was a sloppy ocean, somehow unsatisfactory. Marking a sloppy day.

Anthony felt a thing twist in his mind. Something that, in its own time, would lead to anger.

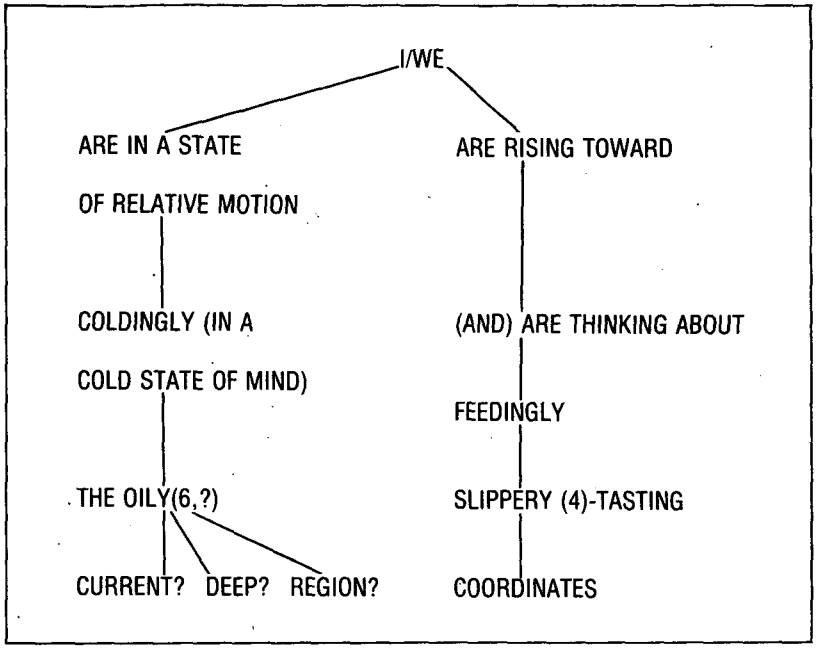
The boat had been out here, both in the warm current and then in the cold, for three days. Each more unsatisfactory than the last.

The growing swell was being driven toward land by a storm that was breaking up fifty miles out to sea: the remnants of the storm itself would arrive by midnight and make things even more unpleasant. Spray feathered across the tops of the waves. The day was growing cold.

Spindrift pattered across Anthony's shoulders. He ignored it, concentrated instead on the long, grating harmonic moan picked up by the microphones his boat dangled into the chill current. The moan ended on a series of clicks and trailed off. Anthony tapped his computer deck. A resolution appeared on the screen. Anthony shaded his eyes from the pale sun and looked at it.

Anthony gazed stonily at the translation tree. "I am rising toward and thinking hungrily about the slippery-tasting coordinates" actually made

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



the most objective sense, but the righthand branch of the tree was the most literal and most of what Anthony suspected was context had been lost. "I and the oily current are in a state of motion toward one another" was perhaps more literal, but "We (the oily deep and I) are in a cold state of mind" was perhaps equally valid.

The boat gave a corkscrew lurch, dropped down the face of a swell, came to an abrupt halt at the end of its drogue. Water slapped against the stern. A mounting screw, come loose from a bracket on the bridge, fell and danced brightly across the deck.

The screw and the deck are in a state of relative motion, Anthony thought. The screw and the deck are in a motion state of mind.

Wrong, he thought, there is no Other in the Dwellers' speech.

We, I and the screw and the deck, are feeling cold.

We, I and the Dweller below, are in a state of mutual incomprehension.

A bad day, Anthony thought.

Inchoate anger burned deep inside him.

Anthony saved the translation and got up from his seat. He went to the bridge and told the boat to retrieve the drogue and head for Cabo Santa Pola at flank speed. He then went below and found a bottle of bourbon that had three good swallows left.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The trailing microphones continued to record the sonorous moans from below, the sound now mingled with the thrash of the boat's screws.

The screw danced on the deck as the engines built up speed.

Its state of mind was not recorded.

The video news, displayed above the bar, showed the Kyklops making his tour of the planet. The Kyklops' human body, male, was tall and blue-eyed and elegant. He made witty conversation and showed off his naked chest as if he were proud of it. His name was Telamon.

His real body, Anthony knew, was a tenuous uncorporeal mass somewhere in *n*-dimensional space. The human body had been grown for it to wear, to move like a puppet. The *n*th dimension was interesting only to a mathematician: its inhabitants preferred wearing flesh.

Anthony asked the bartender to turn off the vid.

The yacht club bar was called the Leviathan, and Anthony hated the name. His creatures were too important, too much themselves, to be awarded a name that stank of human myth, of human resonance that had nothing to do with the creatures themselves. Anthony never called them Leviathans himself. They were Deep Dwellers.

There was a picture of a presumed Leviathan above the bar. Sometimes bits of matter were washed up on shore, thin tenuous membranes, long tentacles, bits of phosphorescence, all encrusted with the local equivalent of barnacles and infested with parasites. It was assumed the stuff had broken loose from the larger Dweller, or were bits of one that had died. The artist had done his best and painted something that looked like a whale covered with tentacles and seaweed.

The place had fake-nautical decor, nets, harpoons, flashing rods, and knicknacks made from driftwood, and the bar was regularly infected by tourists: that made it even worse. But the regular bartender and the divemaster and the steward were real sailors, and that made the yacht club bearable, gave him some company. His mail was delivered here as well.

Tonight the bartender was a substitute named Christopher: he was married to the owner's daughter and got his job that way. He was a fleshy, sullen man and no company.

We, thought Anthony, the world and I, are drinking alone. Anger burned in him, anger at the quality of the day and the opacity of the Dwellers and the storm that beat brainlessly at the windows.

"*Got* the bastard!" A man was pounding the bar. "Drinks on me." He was talking loudly, and he wore gold rings on his fingers. Raindrops sparkled in his hair. He wore a flashing harness, just in case anyone missed why he was here. Hatred settled in Anthony like poison in his belly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Got a thirty-foot flasher," the man said. He pounded the bar again. "Me and Nick got it hung up outside. Four hours. A four-hour fight!"

"Why have a fight with something you can't eat?" Anthony said.

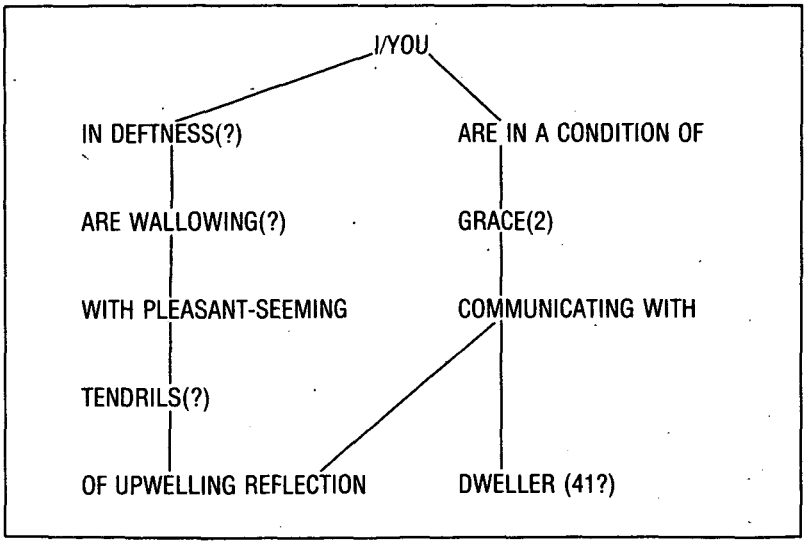
The man looked at him. He looked maybe twenty, but Anthony could tell he was old, centuries old maybe. Old and vain and stupid, stupid as a boy. "It's a game fish," the man said.

Anthony looked into the fisherman's eyes and saw a reflection of his own contempt. "You wanna fight," he said, "you wanna have a *game*, fight something *smart*. Not a dumb animal that you can outsmart, that once you catch it will only rot and stink."

That was the start.

Once it began, it didn't take long. The man's rings cut Anthony's face, and Anthony was smaller and lighter, but the man telegraphed every move and kept leading with his right. When it was over, Anthony left him on the floor and stepped out into the downpour, stood alone in the hammering rain and let the water wash the blood from his face. The whiskey and the rage were a flame that licked his nerves and made them sing.

He began walking down the street. Heading for another bar.



GRACE(2) meant grace in the sense of physical grace, dexterity, harmony of motion, as opposed to spiritual grace, which was GRACE(1). The Dweller that Anthony was listening to was engaged in a dialogue with another, possibly the same known to the computer as 41, who might be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

named "Upwelling Reflection," but Deep Dweller naming systems seemed inconsistent, depending largely on a context that was as yet opaque, and "upwelling reflection" might have to do with something else entirely.

Anthony suspected the Dweller had just said hello.

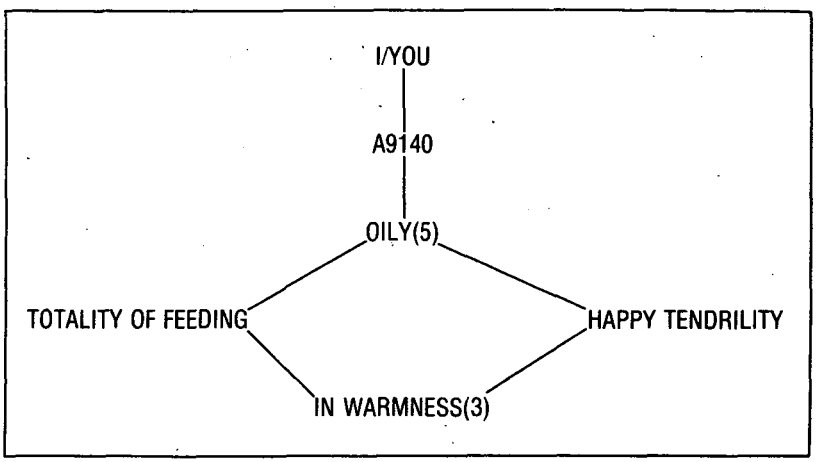
Salt water smarted on the cuts on Anthony's face. His swollen knuckles pained him as he tapped the keys of his computer deck. He never suffered from hangover, and his mind seemed filled with an exemplary clarity; he worked rapidly, with burning efficiency. His body felt energized.

He was out of the cold Kirst Current today, in a warm, calm subtropical sea on the other side of the Las Madres archipelago. The difference of forty nautical miles was astonishing.

The sun warmed his back. Sweat prickled on his scalp. The sea sparkled under a violet sky.

The other Dweller answered.

Through his bare feet, Anthony could feel the subsonic overtones vibrating through the boat. Something in the cabin rattled. The microphones recorded the sounds, raised the subsonics to an audible level, played it back. The computer made its attempt.



A9140 was a phrase that, as yet, had no translation.

The Dweller language, Anthony had discovered, had no separation of subject and object; it was a trait in common with the Earth cetaceans whose languages Anthony had first learned. "I swim toward the island" was not a grammatical possibility: "I and the island are in a condition of swimming toward one another" was the nearest possible approximation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Dwellers lived in darkness, and, like Earth's cetaceans, in a liquid medium. Perhaps they were psychologically unable to separate themselves from their environment, from their fluid surroundings. Never approaching the surface—it was presumed they could not survive in a non-pressurized environment—they had no idea of the upper limit of their world.

They were surrounded by a liquid three-dimensional wholeness, not an air-earth-sky environment from which they could consider themselves separate.

A high-pitched whooping came over the speakers, and Anthony smiled as he listened. The singer was one of the humpbacks that he had imported to this planet, a male called The One with Two Notches on His Starboard Fluke.

Two Notches was one of the brighter whales, and also the most playful. Anthony ordered his computer to translate the humpback speech.

ANTHONY, I AND A PLACE OF BAD SMELLS HAVE FOUND ONE ANOTHER, BUT THIS HAS NOT DETERRED OUR HUNGER.

The computer played back the message as it displayed the translation, and Anthony could understand more context from the sound of the original speech: that Two Notches was floating in a cold layer beneath the bad smell, and that the bad smell was methane or something like it—humans couldn't smell methane, but whales could. The over-literal translation was an aid only, to remind Anthony of idioms he might have forgotten.

Anthony's name in humpback was actually He Who Has Brought Us to the Sea of Rich Strangeness, but the computer translated it simply. Anthony tapped his reply.

What is it that stinks, Two Notches?

SOME KIND OF HORRID JELLYFISH. WERE THEY-AND-I FEEDING, THEY-AND-I WOULD SPIT ONE ANOTHER OUT. I/THEY WILL GIVE THEM/ME A NAME: THEY/ME ARE THE JELLYFISH THAT SMELL LIKE INDIGESTION.

That is a good name, Two Notches.

I AND A SMALL BOAT DISCOVERED EACH OTHER EARLIER TODAY. WE ITCHED, SO WE SCRATCHED OUR BACK ON THE BOAT. THE HUMANS AND I WERE STARTLED. WE HAD A GOOD LAUGH TOGETHER IN SPITE OF OUR HUNGER.

Meaning that Two Notches had risen under the boat, scratched his back on it, and terrified the passengers witless. Anthony remembered the first time this had happened to him back on Earth, a vast female humpback rising up without warning, one long scalloped fin breaking the water to port, the rest of the whale to starboard, thrashing in cetacean delight as it rubbed itself against a boat half its length. Anthony had clung to the gunwale, horrified by what the whale could do to his boat,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but still exhilarated, delighted at the sight of the creature and its glorious joy.

Still, Two Notches ought not to play too many pranks on the tourists.

We should be careful, Two Notches. Not all humans possess our sense of humor, especially if they are hungry.

WE WERE BORED, ANTHONY. MATING IS OVER, FEEDING HAS NOT BEGUN. ALSO, IT WAS NICK'S BOAT THAT GOT SCRATCHED. IN OUR OPINION NICK AND I ENJOYED OURSELVES, EVEN THOUGH WE WERE HUNGRY.

Hunger and food seemed to be the humpback subtheme of the day. Humpback songs, like the human, were made up of text and chorus, the chorus repeating itself, with variations, through the message.

I and Nick will ask each other and find out, as we feed.

Anthony tried to participate in the chorus/response about food, but he found himself continually frustrated at his clumsy phrasing. Fortunately the whales were tolerant of his efforts.

HAVE WE LEARNED ANYTHING ABOUT THE ONES THAT SWIM DEEP AND DO NOT BREATHE AND FEED ON OBSCURE THINGS?

Not yet, Two Notches. Something has interrupted us in our hungry quest.

A CONDITION OF MISFORTUNE EXISTS, LIKE UNTO HUNGER. WE MUST LEARN TO BE QUICKER.

We will try, Two Notches. After we eat.

WE WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK TO THE DEEP DWELLERS NOW, AND FEED WITH THEM, BUT WE MUST BREATHE.

We will speak to ourselves another time, after feeding.

WE ARE IN A CONDITION OF HUNGER, ANTHONY. WE MUST EAT SOON.

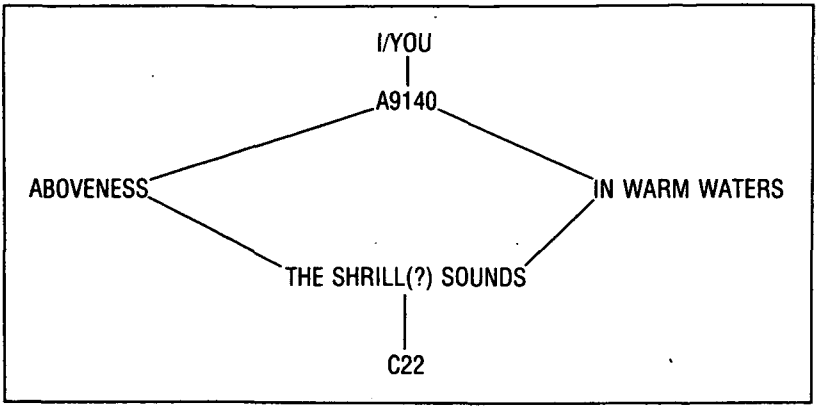
We will remember our hunger and make plans.

The mating and calving season for the humpbacks was over. Most of the whales were already heading north to their summer feeding grounds, where they would do little but eat for six months. Two Notches and one of the other males had remained in the vicinity of Las Madres as a favor to Anthony, who used them to assist in locating the Deep Dwellers, but soon—in a matter of days—the pair would have to head north. They hadn't eaten anything for nearly half a year; Anthony didn't want to starve them.

But when the whales left, Anthony would be alone—again—with the Deep Dwellers. He didn't want to think about that.

The system's second sun winked across the waves, rising now. It was a white dwarf and emitted dangerous amounts of X-rays. The boat's falkner generator, triggered by the computer, snapped on a field that surrounded the boat and guarded it from energetic radiation. Anthony felt the warmth on his shoulders decrease. He turned his attention back to the Deep Dwellers.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



A blaze of delight rose in Anthony. The Dwellers, he realized, had overheard his conversation with Two Notches, and were commenting on it. Furthermore, he knew, A9140 probably was a verb form having to do with hearing—the Dwellers had a lot of them. "I/You hear the shrill sounds from above" might do as a working translation, and although he had no idea how to translate C22, he suspected it was a comment on the sounds. In a fever, Anthony began to work. As he bent over his keys he heard, through water and bone, the sound of Two Notches singing.

The Milky Way was a dim watercolor wash overhead. An odd twilight hung over Las Madres, a near-darkness that marked the hours when only the dwarf star was in the sky, providing little visible light but still pouring out X-rays. Cabo Santa Pola lay in a bright glowing crescent across the boat's path. Music drifted from a waterfront tavern, providing a counterpoint to the Deep Dweller speech that still rang in Anthony's head. A familiar figure waited on the dock, standing beneath the yellow lamp that marked Anthony's slip. Anthony waved and throttled the boat back.

A good day. Even after the yellow sun had set, Anthony still felt in a sunny mood. A9140 had been codified as "listen(14)," meaning listen solely in the sense of listening to a sound that originated from far outside the Dwellers' normal sphere—from outside their entire universe, in fact, which spoke volumes for the way the Dwellers saw themselves in relation to their world. They knew something else was up there, and their speech could make careful distinction between the world they knew and could perceive directly and the one they didn't. C22 was a descriptive term involving patterning: the Dwellers realized that the cetacean speech they'd been hearing wasn't simply random. Which spoke rather well for their cognition.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Anthony turned the boat and backed into the slip. Nick Kanellopoulos, whom the humpbacks called The One Who Chases Bad-Tasting Fish, took the sternline that Anthony threw him and tied it expertly to a cleat. Anthony shut off the engines, took a bowline, and hopped to the dock. He bent over the cleat and made his knot.

"You've gotta stop beating up my customers, Anthony," Nick said.

Anthony said nothing.

"You even send your damn whales to harass me."

Anthony jumped back into the boat and stepped into the cabin for a small canvas bag that held his gear and the data cubes containing the Dwellers' conversation. When he stepped back out of the cabin, he saw Nick standing on one foot, the other poised to step into the boat. Anthony gave Nick a look and Nick pulled his foot back. Anthony smiled. He didn't like people on his boat.

"Dinner?" he asked.

Nick gazed at him. A muscle moved in the man's cheek. He was dapper, olive-skinned, about a century old, the second-youngest human on the planet. He looked in his late teens. He wore a personal falkner generator on his belt that protected him from the dwarf's X-rays.

"Dinner. Fine." His brown eyes were concerned. "You look like hell, Anthony."

Anthony rubbed the stubble on his cheeks. "I feel on top of the world," he said.

"Half the time you don't even talk to me. I don't know why I'm eating supper with you."

"Let me clean up. Then we can go to the Mary Villa."

Nick shook his head. "Okay," he said. "But you're buying. You cost me a customer last night."

Anthony slapped him on the shoulder. "Least I can do, I guess."

A good day.

Near midnight. Winds beat at the island's old volcanic cone, pushed down the crowns of trees. A shuttle, black against the darkness of the sky, rose in absolute silence from the port on the other side of the island, heading toward the bright fixed star that was Overlook Station. The alien, Telamon, was aboard, or so the newscasts reported.

Deep Dwellers still sang in Anthony's head. Mail in hand, he let himself in through the marina gate and walked toward his slip. The smell of the sea rose around him. He stretched, yawned. Belched up a bit of the tequila he'd been drinking with Nick. He intended to get an early start and head back to sea before dawn.

Anthony paused beneath a light and opened the large envelope, pulled out page proofs that had been mailed, at a high cost, from the offices of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the *Xenobiology Review* on Kemps. Discontent scratched at his nerves. He frowned as he glanced through the pages. He'd written the article over a year before, at the end of the first spring he'd spent here, and just glancing through it he now found the article over-tentative, over-formal, and, worse, almost pleading in its attempt to justify his decision to move himself and the whales here. The palpable defensiveness made him want to squirm.

Disgust filled him. His fingers clutched at the pages, then tore the proofs across. His body spun full circle as he scaled the proofs out to the sea. The wind scattered thick chunks of paper across the dark waters of the marina.

He stalked toward his boat. Bile rose in his throat. He wished he had a bottle of tequila with him. He almost went back for one before he realized the liquor stores were closed.

"Anthony Maldalena?"

She was a little gawky, and her skin was pale. Dark hair in a single long braid, deep eyes, a bit of an overbite. She was waiting for him at the end of his slip, under the light. She had a bag over one shoulder.

Anthony stopped. Dull anger flickered in his belly. He didn't want anyone taking notice of the bruises and cuts on his face. He turned his head away as he stepped into his boat, dropped his bag on a seat.

"Mr. Maldalena. My name is Philana Telander. I came here to see you."

"How'd you get in?"

She gestured to the boat two slips down, a tall FPS-powered yacht shaped like a flat oval with a tall flybridge jutting from its center so that the pilot could see over wavetops. It would fly from place to place, but she could put it down in the water if she wanted. No doubt she'd bought a temporary membership at the yacht club.

"Nice boat," said Anthony. It would have cost her a fair bit to have it gated here. He opened the hatch to his forward cabin, tossed his bag onto the long couch inside.

"I meant," she said, "I came to this *planet* to see you."

Anthony didn't say anything, just straightened from his stoop by the hatch and looked at her. She shifted from one foot to another. Her skin was yellow in the light of the lamp. She reached into her bag and fumbled with something.

Anthony waited.

The clicks and sobs of whales sounded from the recorder in her hand.

"I wanted to show you what I've been able to do with your work. I have some articles coming up in *Cetology Journal* but they won't be out for a while."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You've done very well," said Anthony. Tequila swirled in his head. He was having a hard time concentrating on a subject as difficult as whale speech.

Philana had specialized in communication with female humpbacks. It was harder to talk with the females: although they were curious and playful, they weren't vocal like the bulls; their language was deeper, briefer, more personal. They made no songs. It was almost as if, solely in the realm of speech, the cows were autistic. Their psychology was different and complicated, and Anthony had had little success in establishing any lasting communication. The cows, he had realized, were speaking a second tongue: the humpbacks were essentially bilingual, and Anthony had only learned one of their languages.

Philana had succeeded where Anthony had found only frustration. She had built from his work, established a structure and basis for communication. She still wasn't as easy in her speech with the cows as Anthony was with a bull like Two Notches, but she was far closer than Anthony had ever been.

Steam rose from the coffee cup in Philana's hand as she poured from Anthony's vacuum flask. She and Anthony sat on the cushioned benches in the stern of Anthony's boat. Tequila still buzzed in Anthony's head. Conflicting urges warred in him. He didn't want anyone else here, on his boat, this close to his work; but Philana's discoveries were too interesting to shut her out entirely. He swallowed more coffee.

"Listen to this," Philana said. "It's fascinating. A cow teaching her calf about life." She touched the recorder, and muttering filled the air. Anthony had difficulty understanding: the cow's idiom was complex, and bore none of the poetic repetition that made the males' language easier to follow. Finally he shook his head.

"Go ahead and turn it off," he said. "I'm picking up only one phrase in five. I can't follow it."

Philana seemed startled. "Oh. I'm sorry. I thought—"

Anthony twisted uncomfortably in his seat. "I don't know every goddamn thing about whales," he said.

The recorder fell silent. Wind rattled the canvas awning over the flybridge. Savage discontent settled into Anthony's mind. Suddenly he needed to get rid of this woman, get her off his boat and head to sea right now, away from all the things on land that could trip him up.

He thought of his father upside-down in the smokehouse. Not moving, arms dangling.

He should apologize, he realized. We are, he thought, in a condition of permanent apology.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm just . . . not used to dealing with people."

"Sometimes I wonder," she said. "I'm only twenty-one, and . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes?" Blurted suddenly, the tequila talking. Anthony felt disgust at his own awkwardness.

Philana looked at the planks. "Yes. Truly. I'm twenty-one, and sometimes people get impatient with me for reasons I don't understand."

Anthony's voice was quiet. "I'm twenty-six."

Philana was surprised. "But. I thought." She thought for a long moment. "It seems I've been reading your papers for . . ."

"I was first published at twenty," he said. "The finback article."

Philana shook her head. "I'd never have guessed. Particularly after what I saw in your new *XR* paper."

Anthony's reaction was instant. "You saw that?" Another spasm of disgust touched him. Tequila burned in his veins. His stomach turned over. For some reason his arms were trembling.

"A friend on Kemps sent me an advance copy. I thought it was brilliant. The way you were able to codify your conceptions about a race of which you could really know nothing, and have it all pan out when you began to understand them. That's an incredible achievement."

"It's a piece of crap." Anthony wanted more tequila badly. His body was shaking. He tossed the remains of his coffee over his shoulder into the sea. "I've learned so much since. I've given up even trying to publish it. The delays are too long. Even if I put it on the nets, I'd still have to take the time to write it, and I'd rather spend my time working."

"I'd like to see it."

He turned away from her. "I don't show my work till it's finished."

"I . . . didn't mean to intrude."

Apology. He could feel a knife twisting in his belly. He spoke quickly. "I'm sorry, Miss Telander. It's late, and I'm not used to company. I'm not entirely well." He stood, took her arm. Ignoring her surprise, he almost pulled her to her feet. "Maybe tomorrow. We'll talk again."

She blinked up at him. "Yes. I'd like that."

"Good night." He rushed her off the boat and stepped below to the head. He didn't want her to hear what was going to happen next. Acid rose in his throat. He clutched his middle and bent over the small toilet and let the spasms take him. The convulsions wracked him long after he was dry. After it was over he stood shakily, staggered to the sink, washed his face. His sinus burned and brought tears to his eyes. He threw himself on the couch.

In the morning, before dawn, he cast off and motored out into the quiet sea.

The other male, The One Who Sings of Others, found a pair of Dwellers engaged in a long conversation and hovered above them. His transponder led Anthony to the place, fifty miles south into the bottomless tropical

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ocean. The Dwellers' conversation was dense. Anthony understood perhaps one word-phrase in ten. Sings of Others interrupted from time to time to tell Anthony how hungry he was.

The recordings would require days of work before Anthony could even begin to make sense of them. He wanted to stay on the site, but the Dwellers fell silent, neither Anthony nor Sings of Others could find another conversation, and Anthony was near out of supplies. He'd been working so intently he'd never got around to buying food.

The white dwarf had set by the time Anthony motored into harbor. Dweller mutterings did a chaotic dance in his mind. He felt a twist of annoyance at the sight of Philana Telander jumping from her big air yacht to the pier. She had obviously been waiting for him.

He threw her the bowline and she made fast. As he stepped onto the dock and fastened the sternline, he noticed sunburn reddening her cheeks. She'd spent the day on the ocean.

"Sorry I left so early," he said. "One of the humpbacks found some Dwellers, and their conversation sounded interesting."

She looked from Anthony to his boat and back. "That's all right," she said. "I shouldn't have talked to you last night. Not when you were ill."

Anger flickered in his mind. She'd heard him being sick, then.

"Too much to drink," he said. He jumped back into the boat and got his gear.

"Have you eaten?" she asked. "Somebody told me about a place called the Villa Mary."

He threw his bag over one shoulder. Dinner would be his penance. "I'll show you," he said.

"Mary was a woman who died," Anthony said. "One of the original Knight's Move people. She chose to die, refused the treatments. She didn't believe in living forever." He looked up at the arched ceiling, the moldings on walls and ceiling, the initials ML worked into the decoration. "Brian McGivern built this place in her memory," Anthony said. "He's built a lot of places like this, on different worlds."

Philana was looking at her plate. She nudged a ichthyoid exomembrane with her fork. "I know," she said. "I've been in a few of them."

Anthony reached for his glass, took a drink, then stopped himself from taking a second swallow. He realized that he'd drunk most of a bottle of wine. He didn't want a repetition of last night.

With an effort he put the glass down.

"She's someone I think about, sometimes," Philana said. "About the choice she made."

"Yes?" Anthony shook his head. "Not me. I don't want to spend a hundred years dying. If I ever decide to die, I'll do it quick."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That's what people say. But they never do it. They just get older and older. Stranger and stranger." She raised her hands, made a gesture that took in the room, the decorations, the entire white building on its cliff overlooking the sea. "Get old enough, you start doing things like building Villa Marys all over the galaxy. McGivern's an oldest-generation immortal, you know. Maybe the wealthiest human anywhere, and he spends his time immortalizing someone who didn't want immortality of any kind."

Anthony laughed. "Sounds like you're thinking of becoming a Diehard."

She looked at him steadily. "Yes."

Anthony's laugher froze abruptly. A cool shock passed through him. He had never spoken to a Diehard before: the only ones he'd met were people who mumbled at him on streetcorners and passed out incoherent religious tracts.

Philana looked at her plate. "I'm sorry," she said.

"Why sorry?"

"I shouldn't have brought it up."

Anthony reached for his wine glass, stopped himself, put his hand down. "I'm curious."

She gave a little, apologetic laugh. "I may not go through with it."

"Why even think about it?"

Philana thought a long time before answering. "I've seen how the whales accept death. So graceful about it, so matter-of-fact—and they don't even have the myth of an afterlife to comfort them. If they get sick, they just beach themselves; and their friends try to keep them company. And when I try to give myself a reason for living beyond my natural span, I can't think of any. All I can think of is the whales."

Anthony saw the smokehouse in his mind, his father with his arms hanging, the fingers touching the dusty floor. "Death isn't nice."

Philana gave him a skeletal grin and took a quick drink of wine. "With any luck," she said, "death isn't anything at all."

Wind chilled the night, pouring upon the town through a slot in the island's volcanic cone. Anthony watched a streamlined head as it moved in the dark windwashed water of the marina. The head belonged to a cold-blooded amphibian that lived in the warm surf of the Las Madres; the creature was known misleadingly as a Las Madres seal. They had little fear of humanity and were curious about the new arrivals. Anthony stamped a foot on the slip. Planks boomed. The seal's head disappeared with a soft splash. Ripples spread in starlight, and Anthony smiled.

Philana had stepped into her yacht for a sweater. She returned, cast a glance at the water, saw nothing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Can I listen to the Dwellers?" she asked. "I'd like to hear them."

Despite his resentment at her imposition, Anthony appreciated her being careful with the term: she hadn't called them Leviathans once. He thought about her request, could think of no reason to refuse save his own stubborn reluctance. The Dweller sounds were just background noise, meaningless to her. He stepped onto his boat, took a cube from his pocket, put it in the trapdoor, pressed the PLAY button. Dweller murmurings filled the cockpit. Philana stepped from the dock to the boat. She shivered in the wind. Her eyes were pools of dark wonder.

"So different."

"Are you surprised?"

"I suppose not."

"This isn't really what they sound like. What you're hearing is a computer-generated metaphor for the real thing. Much of their communication is subsonic, and the computer raises the sound to levels we can hear, and also speeds it up. Sometimes the Dwellers take three or four minutes to speak what seems to be a simple sentence."

"We would never have noticed them except for an accident," Philana said. "That's how alien they are."

"Yes."

Humanity wouldn't know of the Dwellers' existence at all if it weren't for the subsonics confusing some automated sonar buoys, followed by an idiot computer assuming the sounds were deliberate interference and initiating an ET scan. Any human would have looked at the data, concluded it was some kind of seismic interference, and programmed the buoys to ignore it.

"They've noticed *us*," Anthony said. "The other day I heard them discussing a conversation I had with one of the humpbacks."

Philana straightened. Excitement was plain in her voice. "They can conceptualize something alien to them."

"Yes."

Her response was instant, stepping on the last sibilant of his answer. "And theorize about our existence."

Anthony smiled at her eagerness. "I . . . don't think they've got around to that yet."

"But they are intelligent."

"Yes."

"Maybe more intelligent than the whales. From what you say, they seem quicker to conceptualize."

"Intelligent in certain ways, perhaps. There's still very little I understand about them."

"Can you teach me to talk to them?"

The wind blew chill between them. "I don't," he said, "talk to them."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She seemed not to notice his change of mood, stepped closer. "You haven't tried that yet? That would seem to be reasonable, considering they've already noticed us."

He could feel his hackles rising, mental defenses sliding into place. "I'm not proficient enough," he said.

"If you could attract their attention, they could teach you." Reasonably.

"No. Not yet." Rage exploded in Anthony's mind. He wanted her off his boat, away from his work, his existence. He wanted to be alone again with his creatures, solitary witness to the lonely and wonderful interplay of alien minds.

"I never told you," Philana said, "why I'm here."

"No. You didn't."

"I want to do some work with the humpback cows."

"Why?"

Her eyes widened slightly. She had detected the hostility in his tone. "I want to chart any linguistic changes that may occur as a result of their move to another environment."

Through clouds of blinding resentment Anthony considered her plan. He couldn't stop her, he knew: anyone could talk to the whales if they knew how to do it. It might keep her away from the Dwellers. "Fine," he said. "Do it."

Her look was challenging. "I don't need your permission."

"I know that."

"You don't own them."

"I know that, too."

There was a splash far out in the marina. The Las Madres seal chasing a fish. Philana was still staring at him. He looked back.

"Why are you afraid of my getting close to the Dwellers?" she asked.

"You've been here two days. You don't know them. You're making all manner of assumptions about what they're like, and all you've read is one obsolete article."

"You're the expert. But if my assumptions are wrong, you're free to tell me."

"Humans interacted with whales for centuries before they learned to speak with them, and even now the speech is limited and often confused. I've only been here two and a half years."

"Perhaps," she said, "you could use some help. Write those papers of yours. Publish the data."

He turned away. "I'm doing fine," he said.

"Glad to hear it." She took a long breath. "What did I *do*, Anthony? Tell me."

"Nothing," he said. Anthony watched the marina waters, saw the amphibian surface, its head pulled back to help slide a fish down its gullet.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Philana was just standing there. We, thought Anthony, are in a condition of non-resolution.

"I work alone," he said. "I immerse myself in their speech, in their environment, for months at a time. Talking to a human breaks my concentration. I don't know *how* to talk to a person right now. After the Dwellers, you seem perfectly . . ."

"Alien?" she said. Anthony didn't answer. The amphibian slid through the water, its head leaving a short, silver wake.

The boat rocked as Philana stepped from it to the dock. "Maybe we can talk later," she said. "Exchange data or something."

"Yes," Anthony said. "We'll do that." His eyes were still on the seal.

Later, before he went to bed, he told the computer to play Dweller speech all night long.

Lying in his bunk the next morning, Anthony heard Philana cast off her yacht. He felt a compulsion to talk to her, apologize again, but in the end he stayed in his rack, tried to concentrate on Dweller sounds. I/We remain in a condition of solitude, he thought, the Dweller phrases coming easily to his mind. There was a brief shadow cast on the port beside him as the big flying boat rose into the sky, then nothing but sunlight and the slap of water on the pier supports. Anthony climbed out of his sleeping bag and went into town, provisioned the boat for a week. He had been too close to land for too long: a trip into the sea, surrounded by nothing but whales and Dweller speech, should cure him of his unease.

Two Notches had switched on his transponder: Anthony followed the beacon north, the boat rising easily over deep blue rollers. Desiring sun, Anthony climbed to the flybridge and lowered the canvas cover. Fifty miles north of Cabo Santa Pola there was a clear dividing line in the water, a line as clear as a meridian on a chart, beyond which the sea was a deeper, purer blue. The line marked the boundary of the cold Kirst current that had journeyed, wreathed in mist from contact with the warmer air, a full three thousand nautical miles from the region of the South Pole. Anthony crossed the line and rolled down his sleeves as the temperature of the air fell.

He heard the first whale speech through his microphones as he entered the cold current: the sound hadn't carried across the turbulent frontier of warm water and cold. The whales were unclear, distant and mixed with the sound of the screws, but he could tell from the rhythm that he was overhearing a dialogue. Apparently Sings of Others had joined Two Notches north of Las Madres. It was a long journey to make overnight, but not impossible.

The cooler air was invigorating. The boat plowed a straight, efficient

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wake through the deep blue sea. Anthony's spirits rose. This was where he belonged, away from the clutter and complication of humanity. Doing what he did best.

He heard something odd in the rhythm of the whalespeech; he frowned and listened more closely. One of the whales was Two Notches: Anthony recognized his speech patterns easily after all this time; but the other wasn't Sings of Others. There was a clumsiness in its pattern of chorus and response.

The other was a human. Annoyance hummed in Anthony's nerves. Back on Earth, tourists or eager amateur explorers sometimes bought cheap translation programs and tried to talk to the whales, but this was no tourist program: it was too eloquent, too knowing. Philana, of course. She'd followed the transponder signal and was busy gathering data about the humpback females. Anthony cut his engines and let the boat drift slowly to put its bow into the wind; he deployed the microphones from their wells in the hull and listened. The song was bouncing off a colder layer below, and it echoed confusingly.

DEEP SWIMMER AND HER CALF, CALLED THE ONE THAT NUDGES, ARE POSSESSED OF ONE ANOTHER. I AND THAT ONE AM THE FATHER. WE HUNGER FOR ONE ANOTHER'S PRESENCE.

Apparently hunger was once again the subtheme of the day. The context told Anthony that Two Notches was swimming in cool water beneath a boat. Anthony turned the volume up:

WE HUNGER TO HEAR OF DEEP SWIMMER AND OUR CALF.

That was the human response: limited in its phrasing and context, direct and to the point.

I AND DEEP SWIMMER ARE SHY. WE WILL NOT PLAY WITH HUMANS. INSTEAD WE WILL PRETEND WE ARE HUNGRY AND VANISH INTO DEEP WATERS.

The boat lurched as a swell caught it at an awkward angle. Water splashed over the bow. Anthony deployed the drogue and dropped from the flybridge to the cockpit. He tapped a message into the computer and relayed it.

I and Two Notches are pleased to greet ourselves. I and Two Notches hope we are not too hungry.

The whale's reply was shaded with delight. HUNGRILY I AND ANTHONY GREET OURSELVES. WE AND ANTHONY'S FRIEND, AIR HUMAN, HAVE BEEN IN A CONDITION OF CONVERSATION.

Air Human, from the flying yacht. Two Notches went on.

WE HAD FOUND OURSELVES SOME DEEP DWELLERS, BUT SOME MOMENTS AGO WE AND THEY MOVED BENEATH A COLD LAYER AND OUR CONVERSATION IS LOST. I STARVE FOR ITS RETURN.

The words echoed off the cold layer that stood like a wall between

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Anthony and the Dwellers. The humpback inflections were steeped in annoyance.

Our hunger is unabated, Anthony typed. *But we will wait for the non-breathers' return.*

WE CANNOT WAIT LONG. TONIGHT WE AND THE NORTH MUST BEGIN THE JOURNEY TO OUR FEEDING TIME.

The voice of Air Human rumbled through the water. It sounded like a distant, throbbing engine. OUR FINEST GREETINGS, ANTHONY. I AND TWO NOTCHES WILL TRAVEL NORTH TOGETHER. THEN WE AND THE OTHERS WILL FEED.

Annoyance slammed into Anthony. Philana had abducted his whale. Clenching his teeth, he typed a civil reply:

Please give our kindest greetings to our hungry brothers and sisters in the north.

By the time he transmitted his speech his anger had faded. Two Notches' departure was inevitable in the next few days, and he'd known that. Still, a residue of jealousy burned in him. Philana would have the whale's company on its journey north: he would be stuck here by Las Madres without the keen whale ears that helped him find the Dwellers.

Two Notches' reply came simultaneously with a programmed reply from Philana. Lyrics about greetings, hunger, feeding, calves, and joy whined through the water, bounced from the cold layer. Anthony looked at the hash his computer made of the translation and laughed. He decided he might as well enjoy Two Notches' company while it lasted.

That was a strange message to hear from our friend, Two Mouths, he typed. "Notch" and "mouth" were almost the same phrase: Anthony had just made a pun.

Whale amusement bubbled through the water. TWO MOUTHS AND I BELONG TO THE MOST UNUSUAL FAMILY BETWEEN SURFACE AND COLD WATER. WE-ALL AND AIR BREATHE EACH OTHER, BUT SOME OF US HAVE THE BAD FORTUNE TO LIVE IN IT.

The sun warmed Anthony's shoulders in spite of the cool air. He decided to leave off the pursuit of the Dwellers and spend the day with his humpback.

He kicked off his shoes, then stepped down to his cooler and made himself a sandwich.

The Dwellers never came out from beneath the cold layer. Anthony spent the afternoon listening to Two Notches tell stories about his family. Now that the issue of hunger was resolved by the whale's decision to migrate, the cold layer beneath them became the new topic of conversation, and Two Notches amused himself by harmonizing with his own echo. Sings of Others arrived in late afternoon and announced he had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

already begun his journey: he and Two Notches decided to travel in company.

NORTHWARD HOMING! COLD WATERING! REUNION JOYOUS! The phrases dopplered closer to Anthony's boat, and then Two Notches broke the water thirty feet off the port beam, salt water pouring like Niagara from his black jaw, his scalloped fins spread like wings eager to take the air . . . Anthony's breath went out of him in surprise. He turned in his chair and leaned away from the sight, half in fear and half in awe . . . Even though he was used to the whales, the sight never failed to stun him, thrill him, freeze him in his tracks.

Two Notches toppled over backwards, one clear brown eye fixed on Anthony. Anthony raised an arm and waved, and he thought he saw amusement in Two Notches' glance, perhaps the beginning of an answering wave in the gesture of a fin. A living creature the size of a bus, the whale struck the water not with a smack, but with a roar, a sustained outpour of thunder. Anthony braced himself for what was coming. Salt water flung itself over the gunwale, struck him like a blow. The cold was shocking: his heart lurched. The boat was flung high on the wave, dropped down its face with a jarring thud. Two Notches' flukes tossed high and Anthony could see the mottled pattern, grey and white, on the underside, distinctive as a fingerprint . . . and then the flukes were gone, leaving behind a rolling boat and a boiling sea.

Anthony wiped the ocean from his face, then from his computer. The boat's auto-baling mechanism began to throb. Two Notches surfaced a hundred yards off, spouted a round cloud of steam, submerged again. The whale's amusement stung the water. Anthony's surprise turned to joy, and he echoed the sound of laughter.

I'm going to run my boat up your backside, Anthony promised; he splashed to the controls in his bare feet, withdrew the drogue and threw his engines into gear. Props thrashed the sea into foam. Anthony drew the microphones up into their wells, heard them thud along the hull as the boat gained way. Humpbacks usually took breath in a series of three: Anthony aimed ahead for Two Notches' second rising. Two Notches rose just ahead, spouted, and dove before Anthony could catch him. A cold wind cut through Anthony's wet shirt, raised bumps on his flesh. The boat increased speed, tossing its head on the face of a wave, and Anthony raced ahead, aiming for where Two Notches would rise for the third time.

The whale knew where the boat was and was able to avoid him easily; there was no danger in the game. Anthony won the race: Two Notches surfaced just aft of the boat, and Anthony grinned as he gunned his propellers and wrenched the rudder from side to side while the boat spewed foam into the whale's face. Two Notches gave a grunt of disappointment and sounded, tossing his flukes high. Unless he chose to rise

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

early, Two Notches would be down for five minutes or more. Anthony raced the boat in circles, waiting. Two Notches' taunts rose in the cool water. The wind was cutting Anthony to the quick. He reached into the cabin for a sweater, pulled it on, ran up to the flybridge just in time to see Two Notches leap again half a mile away, the vast dark body silhouetted for a moment against the setting sun before it fell again into the welcoming sea.

GOODBYE, GOODBYE. I AND ANTHONY SEND FRAGRANT FAREWELLS TO ONE ANOTHER.

White foam surrounded the slick, still place where Two Notches had fallen into the water. Suddenly the flybridge was very cold. Anthony's heart sank. He cut speed and put the wheel amidships. The boat slowed reluctantly, as if it, too, had been enjoying the game. Anthony dropped down the ladder to his computer.

Through the spattered windscreen, Anthony could see Two Notches leaping again, his long wings beating air, his silhouette refracted through seawater and rainbows. Anthony tried to share the whale's exuberance, his joy, but the thought of another long summer alone on his boat, beating his head against the enigma of the Dwellers, turned his mind to ice.

He ordered an infinite repeat of Two Notches' last phrase and stepped below to change into dry clothes. The cold layer echoed his farewells. He bent almost double and began pulling the sweater over his head.

Suddenly he straightened. An idea was chattering at him. He yanked the sweater back down over his trunk, rushed to his computer, tapped another message.

Our farewells need not be said just yet. You and I can follow one another for a few days before I must return. Perhaps you and the non-breathers can find one another for conversation.

ANTHONY IS IN A CONDITION OF MIGRATION. WELCOME, WELCOME. Two Notches' reply was jubilant.

For a few days, Anthony qualified. Before too long he would have to return to port for supplies. Annoyed at himself, he realized he could as easily have victualed for weeks.

Another voice called through the water, sounded faintly through the speakers. *Air Human and Anthony are in a state of tastiest welcome.*

In the middle of Anthony's reply, his fingers paused at the keys. Surprise rose quietly to the surface of his mind.

After the long day of talking in humpback speech, he had forgotten that Air Human was not a humpback. That she was, in fact, another human being sitting on a boat just over the horizon.

Anthony continued his message. His fingers were clumsy now, and he had to go back twice to correct mistakes. He wondered why it was harder to talk to Philana, now that he remembered she wasn't an alien.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

* * *

He asked Two Notches to turn on his transponder, and, all through the deep shadow twilight when the white dwarf was in the sky, the boat followed the whale at a half-mile's distance. The current was cooperative, but in a few days a new set of northwest trade winds would push the current off on a curve toward the equator and the whales would lose its assistance.

Anthony didn't see Philana's boat that first day: just before dawn, Sings of Others heard a distant Dweller conversation to starboard. Anthony told his boat to strike off in that direction and spent most of the day listening. When the Dwellers fell silent, he headed for the whales' transponders again. There was a lively conversation in progress between Air Human and the whales, but Anthony's mind was still on Dwellers. He put on headphones and worked far into the night.

The next morning was filled with chill mist. Anthony awoke to the whooping cries of the humpbacks. He looked at his computer to see if it had recorded any announcement of Dwellers, and there was none. The whales' interrogation by Air Human continued. Anthony's toes curled on the cold, damp planks as he stepped on deck and saw Philana's yacht two hundred yards to port, floating three feet over the tallest swells. Cables trailed from the stern, pulling hydrophones and speakers on a subaquatic sled. Anthony grinned at the sight of the elaborate store-bought rig. He suspected that he got better acoustics with his homebuilt equipment, the translation softwear he'd programmed himself, and his hopelessly old-fashioned boat that couldn't even rise out of the water, but that he'd equipped with the latest-generation silent propellers.

He turned on his speakers. Sure enough, he got more audio interference from Philana's sled than he received from his entire boat.

While making coffee and an omelette of mossmoon eggs Anthony listened to the whales gurgle about their grandparents. He put on a down jacket and stepped onto the boat's stern and ate breakfast, watching the humpbacks as they occasionally broke surface, puffed out clouds of spray, sounded again with a careless, vast toss of their flukes. Their bodies were smooth and black: the barnacles that pebbled their skin on Earth had been removed before they gated to their new home.

Their song could be heard clearly even without the amplifiers. That was one change the contact with humans had brought: the males were a lot more vocal than once they had been, as if they were responding to human encouragement to talk—or perhaps they now had more worth talking about. Their speech was also more terse than before, less overtly poetic; the humans' directness and compactness of speech, caused mainly by their lack of fluency, had influenced the whales to a degree.

The whales were adapting to communication with humans more easily

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

than the humans were adapting to them. It was important to chart that change, be able to say how the whales had evolved, accommodated. They were on an entire new planet now, explorers, and the change was going to come fast. The whales were good at remembering, but artificial intelligences were better. Anthony was suddenly glad that Philana was here, doing her work.

As if on cue she appeared on deck, one hand pressed to her head, holding an earphone: she was listening intently to whalesong. She was bundled up against the chill, and gave a brief wave as she noticed him. Anthony waved back. She paused, beating time with one hand to the rhythm of whalespeech, then waved again and stepped back to her work.

Anthony finished breakfast and cleaned the dishes. He decided to say good morning to the whales, then work on some of the Dweller speech he'd recorded the day before. He turned on his computer, sat down at the console, typed his greetings. He waited for a pause in the conversation, then transmitted. The answer came back sounding like a distant buzzsaw.

WE AND ANTHONY WISH ONE ANOTHER A PASSAGE FILLED WITH SPLENDID ODORS. WE AND AIR HUMAN HAVE BEEN SCENTING ONE ANOTHER'S FAMILIES THIS MORNING.

We wish each other the joy of converse, Anthony typed.

WE HAVE BEEN WONDERING, Two Notches said, IF WE CAN SCENT WHETHER WE AND ANTHONY AND AIR HUMAN ARE IN A CONDITION OF RUT.

Anthony gave a laugh. Humpbacks enjoyed trying to figure out human relationships: they were promiscuous themselves, and intrigued by ways different from their own.

Anthony wondered, sitting in his cockpit, if Philana was looking at him.

Air Human and I smell of aloneness, unpairness, he typed, and he transmitted the message at the same time that Philana entered the even more direct, WE ARE NOT.

THE STATE IS NOT RUT, APARTNESS IS THE SMELL, Two Notches agreed readily—it was all one to him—and the lyrics echoed each other for a long moment, *aloneness, not, unpairness, not. Not.* Anthony felt a chill.

I and the Dwellers' speech are going to try to scent one another's natures, he typed hastily, and turned off the speakers. He opened his case and took out one of the cubes he'd recorded the day before.

Work went slowly.

By noon the mist had burned off the water. His head buzzing with Dweller sounds, Anthony stepped below for a sandwich. The message light was blinking on his telephone. He turned to it, pressed the play button.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"May I speak with you briefly?" Philana's voice. "I'd like to get some data, at your convenience." Her tone shifted to one of amusement. "The condition," she added, "is not that of rut."

Anthony grinned. Philana had been considerate enough not to interrupt him, just to leave the message for whenever he wanted it. He picked up the telephone, connected directory assistance in Cabo Santa Pola, and asked it to route a call to the phone on Philana's yacht. She answered.

"Message received," he said. "Would you join me for lunch?"

"In an hour or so," she said. Her voice was abstracted. "I'm in the middle of something."

"When you're ready. Bye." He rang off, decided to make a fish chowder instead of sandwiches, and drank a beer while preparing it. He began to feel buoyant, cheerful. Siren wailing sounded through the water.

Philana's yacht maneuvered over to his boat just as Anthony finished his second beer. Philana stood on the gunwale, wearing a pale sweater with brown zigzags on it. Her braid was undone, and her brown hair fell around her shoulders. She jumped easily from her gunwale to the flybridge, then came down the ladder. The yacht moved away as soon as it felt her weight leave. She smiled uncertainly as she stepped to the deck.

"I'm sorry to have to bother you," she said.

He offered a grin. "That's okay. I'm between projects right now."

She looked toward the cabin. "Lunch smells good." Perhaps, he thought, food equaled apology.

"Fish chowder. Would you like a beer? Coffee?"

"Beer. Thanks."

They stepped below and Anthony served lunch on the small foldout table. He opened another beer and put it by her place.

"Delicious. I never really learned to cook."

"Cooking was something I learned young."

Her eyes were curious. "Where was that?"

"Lees." Shortly. He put a spoonful of chowder in his mouth so that his terseness would be more understandable.

"I never heard the name."

"It's a planet." Mumbling through chowder. "Pretty obscure." He didn't want to talk about it.

"I'm from Earth."

He looked at her. "Really? Originally? Not just a habitat in the Sol system?"

"Yes. Truly. One of the few. The one and only Earth."

"Is that what got you interested in whales?"

"I've *always* been interested in whales. As far back as I can remember. Long before I ever saw one."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It was the same with me. I grew up near an ocean, built a boat when I was a boy and went exploring. I've never felt more at home than when I'm on the ocean."

"Some people live on the sea all the time."

"In floating habitats. That's just moving a city out onto the ocean. The worst of both worlds, if you ask me."

He realized the beer was making him expansive, that he was declaiming and waving his free hand. He pulled his hand in.

"I'm sorry," he said, "about the last time we talked."

She looked away. "My fault," she said. "I shouldn't have—"

"You didn't do anything wrong." He realized he had almost shouted that, and could feel himself flushing. He lowered his voice. "Once I got out here I realized . . ." This was really hopeless. He plunged on. "I'm not used to dealing with people. There were just a few people on Lees and they were all . . . eccentric. And everyone I've met since I left seems at least five hundred years old. Their attitudes are so . . ." He shrugged.

"Alien." She was grinning.

"Yes."

"I feel the same way. Everyone's so much older, so much more . . . sophisticated, I suppose." She thought about it for a moment. "I *guess* it's sophistication."

"They like to think so."

"I can feel their pity sometimes." She toyed with her spoon, looked down at her bowl.

"And condescension." Bitterness striped Anthony's tongue. "The attitude of, oh, we went through that once, poor darling, but now we know better."

"Yes." Tiredly. "I know what you mean. Like we're not really people yet."

"At least my father wasn't like that. He was crazy, but he let me be a person. He—"

His tongue stumbled. He was not drunk enough to tell this story, and he didn't think he wanted to anyway.

"Go ahead," said Philana. She was collecting data, Anthony remembered, on families.

He pushed back from the table, went to the fridge for another beer. "Maybe later," he said. "It's a long story."

Philana's look was steady. "You're not the only one who knows about crazy fathers."

Then you tell me about yours, he wanted to say. Anthony opened the beer, took a deep swallow. The liquid rose again, acid in his throat, and he forced it down. Memories rose with the fire in Anthony's throat, burning him. His father's fine madness whirled in his mind like leaves

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in a hurricane. We are, he thought, in a condition of mutual trust and permanent antagonism. Something therefore must be done.

"All right." He put the beer on the top of the fridge and returned to his seat. He spoke rapidly, just letting the story come. His throat burned. "My father started life with money. He became a psychologist and then a fundamentalist Catholic lay preacher, kind of an unlicensed messiah. He ended up a psychotic. Dad concluded that civilization was too stupid and corrupt to survive, and he decided to start over. He initiated an unauthorized planetary scan through a transporter gate, found a world that he liked, and moved his family there. There were just four of us at the time, dad and my mother, my little brother, and me. My mother was—is—she's not really her own person. There's a vacancy there. If you're around psychotics a lot, and you don't have a strong sense of self, you can get submerged in their delusions. My mother didn't have a chance of standing up to a full-blooded lunatic like my dad, and I doubt she tried. She just let him run things.

"I was six when we moved to Lees, and my brother was two. We were—" Anthony waved an arm in the general direction of the invisible Milky Way overhead. "—we were half the galaxy away. Clean on the other side of the hub. We didn't take a gate with us, or even instructions and equipment for building one. My father cut us off entirely from everything he hated."

Anthony looked at Philana's shocked face and laughed. "It wasn't so bad. We had everything but a way off the planet. Cube readers, building supplies, preserved food, tools, medical gear, wind and solar generators—Dad thought falkner generators were the cause of the rot, so he didn't bring any with him. My mother pretty much stayed pregnant for the next decade, but luckily the planet was benign. We settled down in a protected bay where there was a lot of food, both on land and in the water. We had a smokehouse to preserve the meat. My father and mother educated me pretty well. I grew up an aquatic animal. Built a sailboat, learned how to navigate. By the time I was fifteen I had charted two thousand miles of coast. I spent more than half my time at sea, the last few years. Trying to get away from my dad, mostly. He kept getting stranger. He promised me in marriage to my oldest sister after my eighteenth birthday." Memory swelled in Anthony like a tide, calm green water rising over the flat, soon to whiten and boil.

"There were some whale-sized fish on Lees, but they weren't intelligent. I'd seen recordings of whales, heard the sounds they made. On my long trips I'd imagine I was seeing whales, imagine myself talking to them."

"How did you get away?"

Anthony barked a laugh. "My dad wasn't the only one who could

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

initiate a planetary scan. Seven or eight years after we landed some resort developers found our planet and put up a hotel about two hundred miles to the south of our settlement." Anthony shook his head. "Hell of a coincidence. The odds against it must have been incredible. My father frothed at the mouth when we started seeing their flyers and boats. My father decided our little settlement was too exposed and we moved farther inland to a place where we could hide better. Everything was camouflaged. He'd hold drills in which we were all supposed to grab necessary supplies and run off into the forest."

"They never found you?"

"If they saw us, they thought we were people on holiday."

"Did you approach them?"

Anthony shook his head. "No. I don't really know why."

"Well. Your father."

"I didn't care much about his opinions by that point. It was so *obvious* he was cracked. I think, by then, I had all I wanted just living on my boat. I didn't see any reason to change it." He thought for a moment. "If he actually tried to marry me off to my sister, maybe I would have run for it."

"But they found you anyway."

"No. Something else happened. The water supply for the new settlement was unreliable, so we decided to build a viaduct from a spring nearby. We had to get our hollow-log pipe over a little chasm, and my father got careless and had an accident. The viaduct fell on him. Really smashed him up, caused all sorts of internal injuries. It was very obvious that if he didn't get help, he'd die. My mother and I took my boat and sailed for the resort."

The words dried up. This was where things got ugly. Anthony decided he really couldn't trust Philana with it, and that he wanted his beer after all. He got up and took the bottle and drank.

"Did your father live?"

"No." He'd keep this as brief as he could. "When my mother and I got back, we found that he'd died two days before. My brothers and sisters gutted him and hung him upside-down in the smokehouse." He stared dully into Philana's horrified face. "It's what they did to any large animal. My mother and I were the only ones who remembered what to do with a dead person, and we weren't there."

"My God. Anthony." Her hands clasped below her face.

"And then—" He waved his hands, taking in everything, the boat's comforts, Overlook, life over the horizon. "Civilization. I was the only one of the children who could remember anything but Lees. I got off the planet and got into marine biology. That's been my life ever since. I was amazed to discover that I and the family were rich—my dad didn't tell

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me he'd left tons of investments behind. The rest of the family's still on Lees, still living in the old settlement. It's all they know." He shrugged. "They're rich, too, of course, which helps. So they're all right."

He leaned back on the fridge and took another long drink. The ocean swell tilted the boat and rolled the liquid down his throat. Whale harmonics made the bottle cap dance on the smooth alloy surface of the refrigerator.

Philana stood. Her words seemed small after the long silence. "Can I have some coffee? I'll make it."

"I'll do it."

They both went for the coffee and banged heads. Reeling back, the expression on Philana's face was wide-eyed, startled, faunlike, as if he'd caught her at something she should be ashamed of. Anthony tried to laugh out an apology, but just then the white dwarf came up above the horizon and the quality of light changed as the screens went up, and with the light her look somehow changed. Anthony gazed at her for a moment and fire began to lap at his nerves. In his head the whales seemed to urge him to make his move.

He put his beer down and grabbed her with an intensity that was made ferocious largely by Anthony's fear that this was entirely the wrong thing, that he was committing an outrage that would compel her shortly to clout him over the head with the coffee pot and drop him in his tracks. Whalesong rang frantic chimes in his head. She gave a strangled cry as he tried to kiss her and thereby confirmed his own worst suspicions about this behavior.

Philana tried to push him away. He let go of her and stepped back, standing stupidly with his hands at his sides. A raging pain in his chest prevented him from saying a word. Philana surprised him by stepping forward and putting her hands on his shoulders.

"Easy," she said. "It's all right, just take it easy."

Anthony kissed her once more, and was somehow able to restrain himself from grabbing her again out of sheer panic and desperation. By and by, as the kiss continued, his anxiety level decreased. I/You, he thought, are rising in warmness, in happy tendrils.

He and Philana began to take their clothes off. He realized this was the first time he had made love to anyone under two hundred years of age.

Dweller sounds murmured in Anthony's mind. He descended into Philana as if she were a midnight ocean, something that on first contact with his flesh shocked him into wakefulness, then relaxed around him, became a taste of brine, a sting in the eyes, a fluid vagueness. Her hair brushed against his skin like seagrass. She surrounded him, buoyed him up. Her cries came up to him as over a great distance, like the faraway

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

moans of a lonely whale in love. He wanted to call out in answer. Eventually he did.

Grace(1), he thought hopefully. Grace(1).

Anthony had an attack of giddiness after Philana returned to her flying yacht and her work. His mad father gibbered in his memory, mocked him and offered dire warnings. He washed the dishes and cleaned the rattling bottlecap off the fridge, then he listened to recordings of Dwellers and eventually the panic went away. He had not, it seemed, lost anything.

He went to the double bed in the forepeak, which was piled high with boxes of food, a spool of cable, a couple spare microphones, and a pair of rusting Danforth anchors. He stowed the food in the hold, put the electronics in the compartment under the mattress, jammed the Danforths farther into the peak on top of the anchor chain where they belonged. He wiped the grime and rust off the mattress and realized he had neither sheets nor a second pillow. He would need to purchase supplies on the next trip to town.

The peak didn't smell good. He opened the forehatch and tried to air the place out. Slowly he became aware that the whales were trying to talk to him. ODD SCENTINGS, they said, THINGS THAT STAND IN WATER. Anthony knew what they meant. He went up on the flybridge and scanned the horizon. He saw nothing.

The taste is distant, he wrote. *But we must be careful in our movement.* After that he scanned the horizon every half hour.

He cooked supper during the white dwarf's odd half-twilight and resisted the urge to drink both the bottles of bourbon that were waiting in their rack. Philana dropped onto the flybridge with a small rucksack. She kissed him hastily, as if to get it over with.

"I'm scared," she said.

"So am I."

"I don't know why."

He kissed her again. "I do," he said. She laid her cheek against his woolen shoulder. Blind with terror, Anthony held onto her, unable to see the future.

After midnight Anthony stood unclothed on the flybridge as he scanned the horizon one more time. Seeing nothing, he nevertheless reduced speed to three knots and rejoined Philana in the forepeak. She was already asleep with his open sleeping bag thrown over her like a blanket. He raised a corner of the sleeping bag and slipped beneath it. Philana turned away from him and pillowed her cheek on her fist. Whale music echoed from a cold layer beneath. He slept.

Movement elsewhere in the boat woke him. Anthony found himself

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

alone in the peak, frigid air drifting over him from the forward hatch. He stepped into the cabin and saw Philana's bare legs ascending the companion to the flybridge. He followed. He shivered in the cold wind.

Philana stood before the controls, looking at them with a peculiar intensity, as though she were trying to figure out which switch to throw. Her hands flexed as if to take the wheel. There was gooseflesh on her shoulders and the wind tore her hair around her face like a fluttering curtain. She looked at him. Her eyes were hard, her voice disdainful.

"Are we lovers?" she asked. "Is that what's going on here?" His skin prickled at her tone.

Her stiff-spined stance challenged him. He was afraid to touch her.

"The condition is that of rut," he said, and tried to laugh.

Her posture, one leg cocked out front, reminded him of a haughty water bird. She looked at the controls again, then looked aft, lifting up on her toes to gaze at the horizon. Her nostrils flared, tasted the wind. Clouds scudded across the sky. She looked at him again. The white dwarf gleamed off her pebble eyes.

"Very well," she said, as if this was news. "Acceptable." She took his hand and led him below. Anthony's hackles rose. On her way to the forepeak Philana saw one of the bottles of bourbon in its rack and reached for it. She raised the bottle to her lips and drank from the neck. Whiskey coursed down her throat. She lowered the bottle and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. She looked at him as if he were something worthy of dissection.

"Let's make love," she said.

Anthony was afraid not to. He went with her to the forepeak. Her skin was cold. Lying next to him on the mattress she touched his chest as if she were unused to the feel of male bodies. "What's your name?" she asked. He told her. "Acceptable," she said again, and with a sudden taut grin raked his chest with her nails. He knocked her hands away. She laughed and came after him with the bottle. He parried the blow in time and they wrestled for possession, bourbon splashing everywhere. Anthony was surprised at her strength. She fastened teeth in his arm. He hit her in the face with a closed fist. She gave the bottle up and laughed in a cold metallic way and put her arms around him. Anthony threw the bottle through the door into the cabin. It thudded somewhere but didn't break. Philana drew him on top of her, her laugh brittle, her legs opening around him.

Her dead eyes were like stones.

In the morning Anthony found the bottle lying in the main cabin. Red clawmarks covered his body, and the reek of liquor caught at the back of his throat. The scend of the ocean had distributed the bourbon puddle

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

evenly over the teak deck. There was still about a third of the whiskey left in the bottle. Anthony rescued it and swabbed the deck. His mind was full of cotton wool, cushioning any bruises. He was working hard at not feeling anything at all.

He put on clothes and began to work. After a while Philana unsteadily groped her way from the forepeak, the sleeping bag draped around her shoulders. There was a stunned look on her face and a livid bruise on one cheek. Anthony could feel his body tautening, ready to repel assault.

"Was I odd last night?" she asked.

He looked at her. Her face crumbled. "Oh no." She passed a hand over her eyes and turned away, leaning on the side of the hatchway. "You shouldn't let me drink," she said.

"You hadn't made that fact clear."

"I don't remember any of it," she said. "I'm sick." She pressed her stomach with her hands and bent over. Anthony narrowly watched her pale buttocks as she groped her way to the head. The door shut behind her.

Anthony decided to make coffee. As the scent of the coffee began to fill the boat, he heard the sounds of her weeping. The long keening sounds, desperate throat-tearing noises, sounded like a pinioned whale writhing helplessly on the gaff.

A vast flock of birds wheeled on the cold horizon, marking a colony of drift creatures. Anthony informed the whales of the creatures' presence, but the humpbacks already knew and were staying well clear. The drift colony was what they had been smelling for hours.

While Anthony talked with the whales, Philana left the head and drew on her clothes. Her movements were tentative. She approached him with a cup of coffee in her hand. Her eyes and nostrils were rimmed with red.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Sometimes that happens."

He looked at his computer console. "Jesus, Philana."

"It's something wrong with me. I can't control it." She raised a hand to her bruised cheek. The hand came away wet.

"There's medication for that sort of thing," Anthony said. He remembered she had a mad father, or thought she did.

"Not for this. It's something different."

"I don't know what to do."

"I need your help."

Anthony recalled his father's body twisting on the end of its rope, fingertips trailing in the dust. Words came reluctantly to his throat.

"I'll give what help I can." The words were hollow: any real resolution had long since gone. He had no clear notion to whom he was giving this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

message, the Philana of the previous night or this Philana or his father or himself.

Philana hugged him, kissed his cheek. She was excited.

"Shall we go see the drifters?" she asked. "We can take my boat."

Anthony envisioned himself and Philana tumbling through space. He had jumped off a precipice, just now. The two children of mad fathers were spinning in the updraft, waiting for the impact.

He said yes. He ordered his boat to circle while she summoned her yacht. She held his hand while they waited for the flying yacht to drift toward them. Philana kept laughing, touching him, stropping her cheek on his shoulder like a cat. They jumped from the flybridge to her yacht and rose smoothly into the sky. Bright sun warmed Anthony's shoulders. He took off his sweater and felt warning pain from the marks of her nails.

The drifters were colony creatures that looked like miniature mountains twenty feet or so high, complete with a white snowcap of guano. They were highly organized but unintelligent, their underwater parts sifting the ocean for nutrients or reaching out to capture prey—the longest of their gossamer stinging tentacles was up to two miles in length, and though they couldn't kill or capture a humpback, they were hard for the whale to detect and could cause a lot of stinging wounds before the whale noticed them and made its escape. Perhaps they were unintelligent, distant relatives of the Deep Dwellers, whose tenuous character they resembled. Many different species of sea birds lived in permanent colonies atop the floating islands, thousands of them, and the drifters processed their guano and other waste. Above the water, the drifters' bodies were shaped like a convex lens set on edge, an aerodynamic shape, and they could clumsily tack into the wind if they needed to. For the most part, however, they drifted on the currents, a giant circular circumnavigation of the ocean that could take centuries.

Screaming sea birds rose in clouds as Philana's yacht moved silently toward their homes. Philana cocked her head back, laughed into the open sky, and flew closer. Birds hurtled around them in an overwhelming roar of wings. Whistlelike cries issued from peg-toothed beaks. Anthony watched in awe at the profusion of colors, the chromatic brilliance of the evolved featherlike scales.

The flying boat passed slowly through the drifter colony. Birds roared and whistled, some of them landing on the boat in apparent hopes of taking up lodging. Feathers drifted down; birdshit spattered the windscreen. Philana ran below for a camera and used up several data cubes taking pictures. A trickle of optimism began to ease into Anthony at the sight of Philana in the bright morning sun, a broad smile gracing her face as she worked the camera and took picture after picture. He put an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

arm around Philana's waist and kissed her ear. She smiled and took his hand in her own. In the bright daylight the personality she'd acquired the previous night seemed to gather unto itself the tenebrous, unreal quality of a nightmare. The current Philana seemed far more tangible.

Philana returned to the controls; the yacht banked and increased speed. Birds issued startled cries as they got out of the way. Wind tugged at Philana's hair. Anthony decided not to let Philana near his liquor again.

After breakfast, Anthony found both whales had set their transponders. He had to detour around the drifters—their insubstantial, featherlike tentacles could foul his state-of-the-art silent props—but when he neared the whales and slowed, he could hear the deep murmurings of Dwellers rising from beneath the cold current. There were half a dozen of them engaged in conversation, and Anthony worked the day and far into the night, transcribing, making hesitant attempts at translation. The Dweller speech was more opaque than usual, depending on a context that was unstated and elusive. Comprehension eluded Anthony; but he had the feeling that the key was within his reach.

Philana waited for the Dwellers to end their converse before she brought her yacht near him. She had heated some prepared dinners and carried them to the flybridge in an insulated pouch. Her grin was broad. She put her pouch down and embraced him. Abstracted Dweller subsonics rolled away from Anthony's mind. He was surprised at how glad he was to see her.

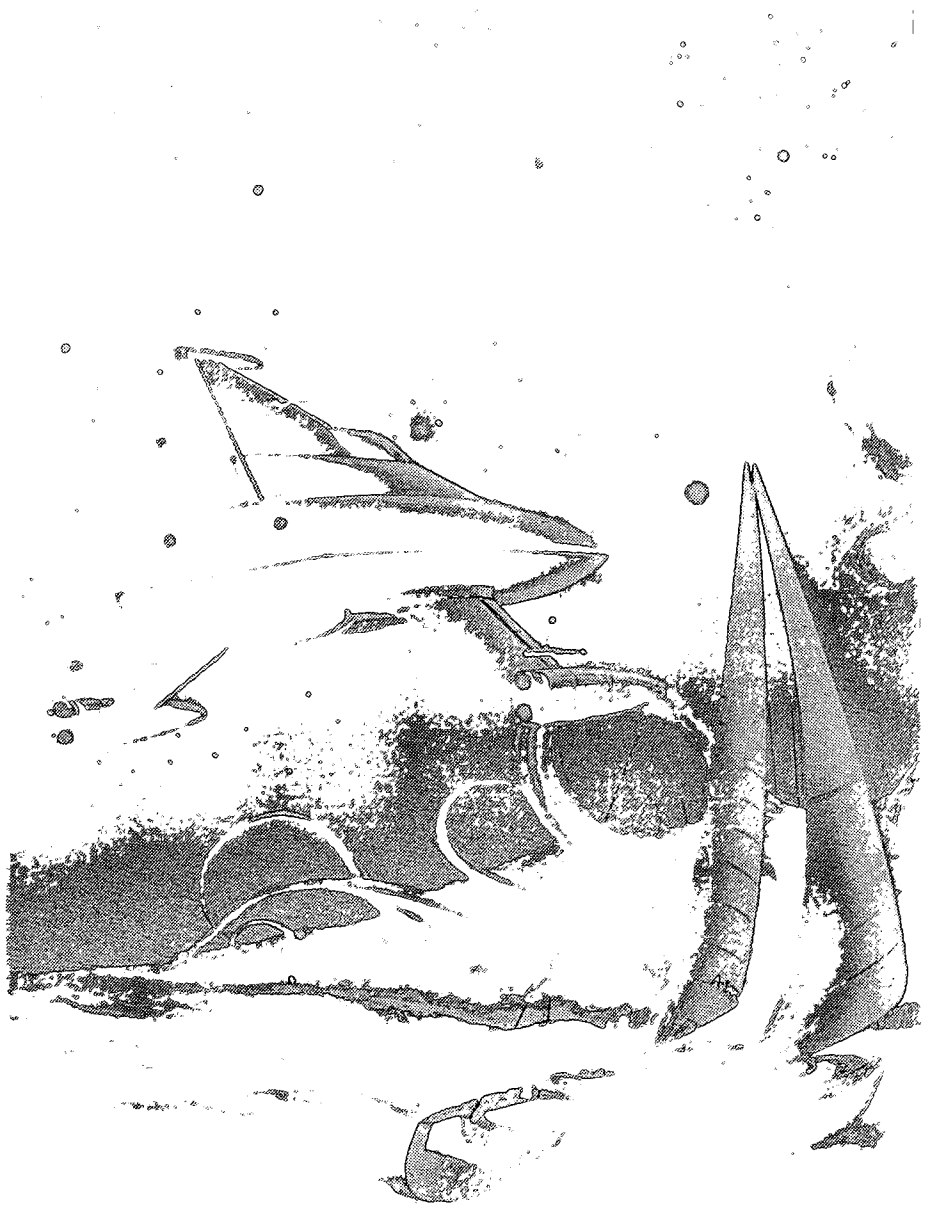
With dinner they drank coffee. Philana chattered bravely throughout the meal. While Anthony cleaned the dishes, she embraced him from behind. A memory of the other Philana flickered in his mind, disdainful, contemptuous, cold. Her father was crazy, he remembered again.

He buried the memory deliberately and turned to her. He kissed her and thought, I/We deny the Other. The Other, he decided, would cease to exist by a common act of will.

It seemed to work. At night his dreams filled with Dwellers crying in joy, his father warning darkly, the touch of Philana's flesh, breath, hands. He awoke hungry to get to work.

The next two days a furious blaze of concentration burned in Anthony's mind. Things fell into place. He found a word that, in its context, could mean nothing but light, as opposed to fluorescence—he was excited to find out the Dwellers knew about the sun. He also found new words for darkness, for emotions that seemed to have no human equivalents, but which he seemed nevertheless to comprehend. One afternoon a squall dumped a gallon of cold water down his collar and he looked up in surprise: he hadn't been aware of its slow approach. He moved his computer deck to the cabin and kept working. When not at the controls he moved dazedly over the boat, drinking coffee, eating what was at hand

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

without tasting it. Philana was amused and tolerant; she buried herself in her own work.

On preparing breakfast the morning of the third day, Anthony realized he was running out of food. He was farther from the archipelago than he'd planned on going, and he had about two days' supply left; he'd have to return at flank speed, buy provisions, and then run out again. A sudden hot fury gripped him. He clenched his fists. He could have provisioned for two or three months—why hadn't he done it when he had the chance?

Philana tolerantly sipped her coffee. "Tonight I'll fly you into Cabo Santa Pola. We can buy a ton of provisions, have dinner at Villa Mary, and be back by midnight."

Anthony's anger floundered uselessly, looking for a target, then gave up. "Fine," he said.

She looked at him. "Are you ever going to talk to them? You must have built your speakers to handle it."

Now the anger had finally found a home. "Not yet," he said.

In late afternoon, Anthony set out his drogue and a homing transponder, then boarded Philana's yacht. He watched while she hauled up her aquasled and programmed the navigation computer. The world dimmed as the falkner field increased in strength. The transition to full speed was almost instantaneous. Waves blurred silently past, providing the only sensation of motion—the field cut out both wind and inertia. The green-walled volcanic islands of the Las Madres archipelago rolled over the horizon in minutes. Traffic over Cabo Santa Pola complicated the approach somewhat; it was all of six minutes before Philana could set the machine down in her slip.

A bright, hot sun brightened the white-and-turquoise waterfront. From a cold Kirst current to the tropics in less than half an hour.

Anthony felt vaguely resentful at this blinding efficiency. He could have easily equipped his own boat with flight capability, but he hadn't cared about speed when he'd set out, only the opportunity to be alone on the ocean with his whales and the Dwellers. Now the very tempo of his existence had changed. He was moving at unaccustomed velocity, and the destination was still unclear.

After giving him her spare key, Philana went to do laundry—when one lived on small boats, laundry was done whenever the opportunity arose. Anthony bought supplies. He filled the yacht's forecabin with crates of food, then changed clothes and walked to the Villa Mary.

Anthony got a table for two and ordered a drink. The first drink went quickly and he ordered a second. Philana didn't appear. Anthony didn't like the way the waiter was looking at him. He heard his father's mocking laugh as he munched the last bread stick. He waited for three hours before he paid and left.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was no sign of Philana at the laundry or on the yacht. He left a note on the computer expressing what he considered a contained disappointment, then headed into town. A brilliant sign that featured aquatic motifs called him to a cool, dark bar filled with bright green aquaria. Native fish gaped at him blindly while he drank something tall and cool. He decided he didn't like the way the fish looked at him and left.

He found Philana in his third bar of the evening. She was with two men, one of whom Anthony knew slightly as a charter boat skipper whom he didn't much like. He had his hand on her knee; the other man's arm was around her. Empty drinks and forsaken hors d'oeuvres lay on a table in front of them.

Anthony realized, as he approached, that his own arrival could only make things worse. Her eyes turned to him as he approached; her neck arched in a peculiar, balletic way that he had seen only once before. He recognized the quick, carnivorous smile, and a wash of fear turned his skin cold. The stranger whispered into her ear.

"What's your name again?" she asked.

Anthony wondered what to do with his hands. "We were supposed to meet."

Her eyes glittered as her head cocked, considering him. Perhaps what frightened him most of all was the fact there was no hostility in her look, nothing but calculation. There was a cigaret in her hand; he hadn't seen her smoke before.

"Do we have business?"

Anthony thought about this. He had jumped into space with this woman, and now he suspected he'd just hit the ground. "I guess not," he said, and turned.

"Que pasó, hombre?"

"Nada."

Pablo, the Leviathan's regular bartender, was one of the planet's original Latino inhabitants, a group rapidly being submerged by newcomers. Pablo took Anthony's order for a double bourbon and also brought him his mail, which consisted of an inquiry from *Xenobiology Review* wondering what had become of their galley proofs. Anthony crumpled the note and left it in an ashtray.

A party of drunken fishermen staggered in, still in their flashing harnesses. Triumphant whoops assaulted Anthony's ears. His fingers tightened on his glass.

"Careful, Anthony," said Pablo. He poured another double bourbon. "On the house," he said.

One of the fishermen stepped to the bar, put a heavy hand on Anthony's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shoulder. "Drinks on me," he said. "Caught a twelve-meter flasher today." Anthony threw the bourbon in his face.

He got in a few good licks, but in the end the pack of fishermen beat him severely and threw him through the front window. Lying breathless on broken glass, Anthony brooded on the injustice of his position and decided to rectify matters. He lurched back into the bar and knocked down the first person he saw.

Small consolation. This time they went after him with the flashing poles that were hanging on the walls, beating him senseless and once more heaving him out the window. When Anthony recovered consciousness he staggered to his feet, intending to have another go, but the pole butts had hit him in the face too many times and his eyes were swollen shut. He staggered down the street, ran face-first into a building, and sat down.

"You finished there, cowboy?" It was Nick's voice.

Anthony spat blood. "Hi, Nick," he said. "Bring them here one at a time, will you? I can't lose one-on-one."

"Jesus, Anthony. You're such an asshole."

Anthony found himself in an inexplicably cheerful mood. "You're lucky you're a sailor. Only a sailor can call me an asshole."

"Can you stand? Let's get to the marina before the cops show up."

"My boat's hundreds of miles away. I'll have to swim."

"I'll take you to my place, then."

With Nick's assistance Anthony managed to stand. He was still too drunk to feel pain, and ambled through the streets in a contented mood. "How did you happen to be at the Leviathan, Nick?"

There was weariness in Nick's voice. "They always call me, Anthony, when you fuck up."

Drunken melancholy poured into Anthony like a sudden cold squall of rain. "I'm sorry," he said.

Nick's answer was almost cheerful. "You'll be sorrier in the morning."

Anthony reflected that this was very likely true.

Nick gave him some pills that, by morning, reduced the swelling. When Anthony awoke he was able to see. Agony flared in his body as he staggered out of bed. It was still twilight. Anthony pulled on his bloody clothes and wrote an incoherent note of thanks on Nick's computer.

Fishing boats were floating out of harbor into the bright dawn. Probably Nick's was among them. The volcano above the town was a contrast in black stone and green vegetation. Pain beat at Anthony's bones like a rain of fists.

Philana's boat was still in its slip. Apprehension tautened Anthony's nerves as he put a tentative foot on the gunwale. The hatch to the cabin

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was still locked. Philana wasn't aboard. Anthony opened the hatch and went into the cabin just to be sure. It was empty.

He programmed the computer to pursue the transponder signal on Anthony's boat, then as the yacht rose into the sky and arrowed over the ocean, Anthony went into Philana's cabin and fell asleep on a pillow that smelled of her hair.

He awoke around noon to find the yacht patiently circling his boat. He dropped the yacht into the water, tied the two craft together, and spent half the afternoon transferring his supplies to his own boat. He programmed the yacht to return to Las Madres and orbit the volcanic spire until it was summoned by its owner or the police.

I and the sea greet one another, he tapped into his console, and as the call wailed out from his boat he hauled in the drogue and set off after the humpbacks. Apartness is the smell, he thought, aloneness is the condition. Spray shot aboard and spattered Anthony, and salt pain flickered from the cuts on his face. He climbed to the flybridge and hoped for healing from the sun and the glittering sea.

The whales left the cold current and suddenly the world was filled with tropic sunshine and bright water. Anthony made light conversation with the humpbacks and spent the rest of his time working on Dweller speech. Despite hours of concentrated endeavor he made little progress. The sensation was akin to that of smashing his head against a stone wall over and over, an act that was, on consideration, not unlike the rest of his life.

After his third day at sea his boat's computer began signaling him that he was receiving messages. He ignored this and concentrated on work.

Two days later he was cruising north with a whale on either beam when a shadow moved across his boat. Anthony looked up from his console and saw without surprise that Philana's yacht was eclipsing the sun. Philana, dark glasses over her deep eyes and a floppy hat over her hair, was peering down from the starboard bow.

"We have to talk," she said.

JOYOUSLY WE GREET AIR HUMAN, whooped Sings of Others.

I AND AIR HUMAN ARE PLEASED TO DETECT ONE ANOTHER'S PRESENCE, called Two Notches.

Anthony went to the controls and throttled up. Microphones slammed at the bottom of his boat. Two Notches poked one large brown eye above the waves to see what was happening, then cheerfully set off in pursuit.

ANTHONY AND AIR HUMAN ARE IN A STATE OF EXCITEMENT, he chattered. I/WE ARE PLEASED TO JOIN OUR RACE.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The flying yacht hung off Anthony's stern. Philana shouted through cupped hands. "Talk to me, Anthony!"

Anthony remained silent and twisted the wheel into a fast left turn. His wake foamed over Two Notches' face and the humpback burbled a protest. The air yacht seemed to have little trouble following the turn. Anthony was beginning to have the sense of that stone wall coming up again, but he tried a few more maneuvers just in case one of them worked. Nothing succeeded. Finally he cut the throttle and let the boat slow on the long blue swells.

The trade winds had taken Philana's hat and carried it away. She ignored it and looked down at him. Her face was pale and beneath the dark glasses she looked drawn and ill.

"I'm not human, Anthony," she said. "I'm a Kyklops. That's what's really wrong with me."

Anthony looked at her. Anger danced in his veins. "You really are full of surprises."

"I'm Telamon's other body," she said. "Sometimes he inhabits me."

Whalesong rolled up from the sea. WE AND AIR HUMAN SEND ONE ANOTHER CHEERFUL SALUTATIONS AND EXPRESSIONS OF GOOD WILL.

"Talk to the whales first," said Anthony.

"Telamon's a scientist," Philana said. "He's impatient, that's his problem."

The boat heaved on an ocean swell. The trade wind moaned through the flybridge. "He's got a few more problems than that," Anthony said.

"He wanted me for a purpose but sometimes he forgets." A tremor of pain crossed Philana's face. She was deeply hung over. Her voice was ragged: Telamon had been smoking like a chimney and Philana wasn't used to it.

"He wanted to do an experiment on human psychology. He wanted to arrange a method of recording a person's memories, then transferring them to his own . . . sphere. He got my parents to agree to having the appropriate devices implanted, but the only apparatus that existed for the connection of human and Kyklops was the one the Kyklopes use to manipulate the human bodies that they wear when they want to enjoy the pleasures of the flesh. And Telamon is . . ." She waved a dismissive arm. "He's a decadent, the way a lot of the Kyklopes turn once they discover how much fun it is to be a human and that their real self doesn't get hurt no matter what they do to their clone bodies. Telamon likes his pleasures, and he likes to interfere. Sometimes, when he dumped my memory into the *n*th dimension and had a look at it, he couldn't resist the temptation to take over my body and rectify what he considered my errors. And occasionally, when he's in the middle of one of his binges,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and his other body gives out on him, he takes me over and starts a party wherever I am."

"Some scientist," Anthony said.

"The Kyklopes are used to experimenting on pieces of themselves," Philana said. "Their own beings are tenuous and rather . . . detachable. Their ethics aren't against it. And he doesn't do it very often. He must be bored wherever he is—he's taken me over twice in a week." She raised her fist to her face and began to cough, a real smoker's hack. Anthony fidgeted and wondered whether to offer her a glass of water. Philana bent double and the coughs turned to cries of pain. A tear pattered on the teak.

A knot twisted in Anthony's throat. He left his chair and held Philana in his arms. "I've never told anyone," she said.

Anthony realized to his transient alarm that once again he'd jumped off a cliff without looking. He had no more idea of where he would land than last time.

Philana, Anthony was given to understand, was Greek for "lover of humanity." The Kyklopes, after being saddled with a mythological name by the first humans who had contacted them, had gone in for classical allusion in a big way. Telamon, Anthony learned, meant (among other things) "the supporter." After learning this, Anthony referred to the alien as Jockstrap.

"We should do something about him," Anthony said. It was late—the white dwarf had just set—but neither of them had any desire to sleep. He and Philana were standing on the flybridge. The falkner shield was off and above their heads the uninhibited stars seemed almost within reach of their questing fingertips. Overlook Station, fixed almost overhead, was bright as a burning brand.

Philana shook her head. "He's got access to my memory. Any plans we make, he can know in an instant." She thought for a moment. "If he bothers to look. He doesn't always."

"I'll make the plans without telling you what they are."

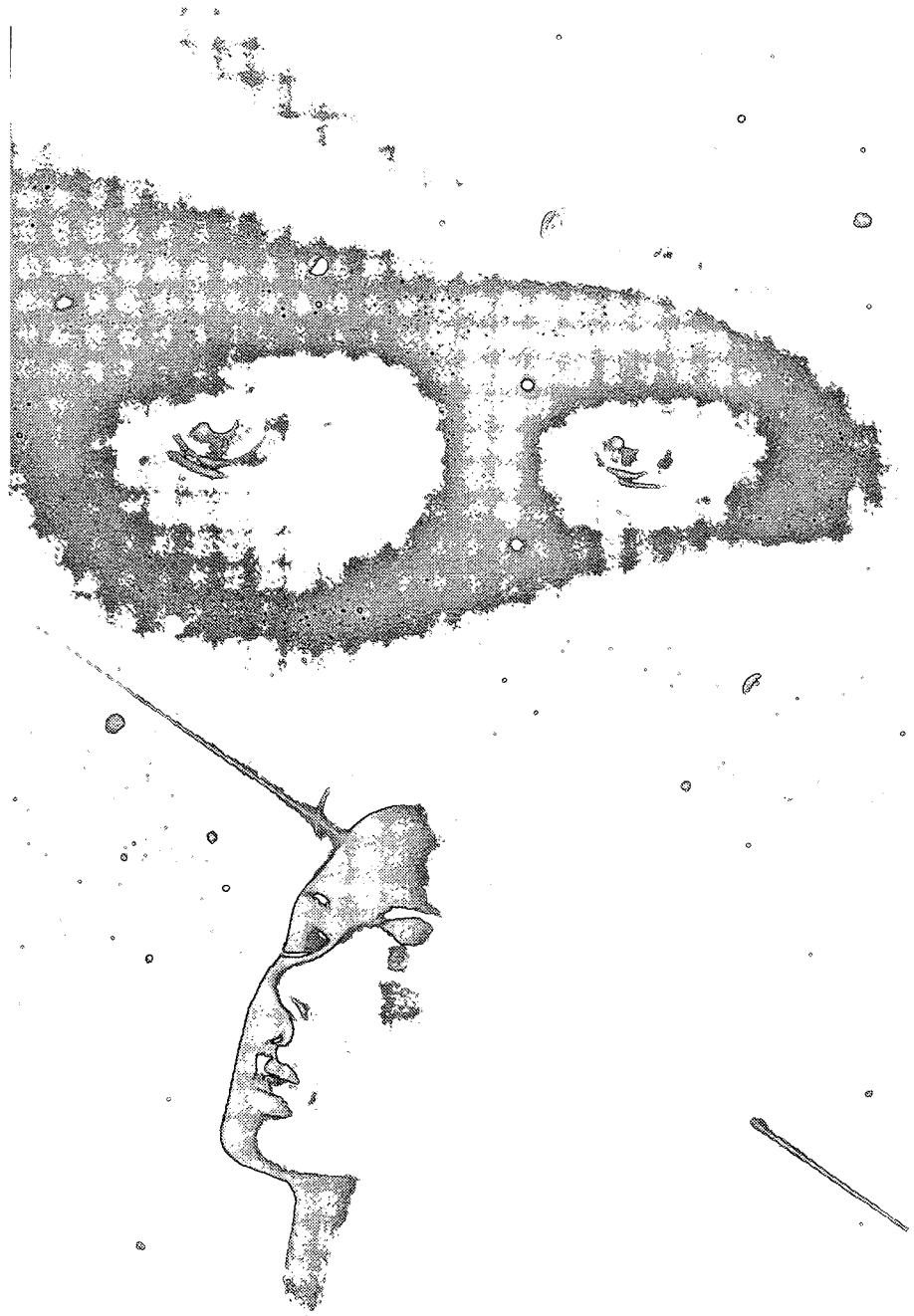
"It will take forever. I've thought about it. You're talking court case. He can sue me for breach of contract."

"It's your parents who signed the contract, not you. You're an adult now."

She turned away. Anthony looked at her for a long moment, a cold foreboding hand around his throat. "I hope," he said, "you're going to tell me that you signed that contract while Jockstrap was riding you."

Philana shook her head silently. Anthony looked up into the Milky Way and imagined the stone wall falling from the void, aimed right

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

between his eyes, spinning slightly as it grew ever larger in his vision. Smashing him again.

"All we have to do is get the thing out of your head," Anthony said. "After that, let him sue you. You'll be free, whatever happens." His tone reflected a resolve that was absent entirely from his heart.

"He'll sue you, too, if you have any part of this." She turned to face him again. Her face pale and taut in the starlight. "All my money comes from him—how else do you think I could afford the yacht? I owe everything to him."

Bitterness sped through Anthony's veins. He could feel his voice turning harsh. "Do you want to get rid of him or not? Yes or no."

"He's not entirely evil."

"Yes or no, Philana."

"It'll take years before he's done with you. And he could kill you. Just transport you to deep space somewhere and let you drift. Or he could simply teleport me away from you."

The bright stars poured down rage. Anthony knew himself seconds away from violence. There were two people on this boat and one of them was about to get hurt. *"Yes or no!"* he shouted.

Philana's face contorted. She put her hands over her ears. Hair fell across her face. "Don't shout," she said.

Anthony turned and smashed his forehead against the control panel of the flybridge. Philana gave a cry of surprise and fear. Anthony drove himself against the panel again. Philana's fingers clutched at his shoulders. Anthony could feel blood running from his scalp. The pain drained his anger, brought a cold, brilliant clarity to his mind. He smashed himself a third time. Philana cried out. He turned to her. He felt a savage, exemplary satisfaction. If one were going to drive oneself against stone walls, one should at least take a choice of the walls available.

"Ask me," Anthony panted, "if I care what happens to me."

Philana's face was a mask of terror. She said his name.

"I need to know where you stand," said Anthony. Blood drooled from his scalp, and he suppressed the unwelcome thought that he had just made himself look ridiculous.

Her look of fear broadened.

"Am I going to jump off this cliff by myself, or what?" Anthony demanded.

"I want to get rid of him," she said.

Anthony wished her voice had contained more determination, even if it were patently false. He spat salt and went in search of his first aid kit. We are in a condition of slow movement through deep currents, he thought.

* * *

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In the morning he got the keys to Philana's yacht and changed the passwords on the falkner controls and navigation comp. He threw all his liquor overboard. He figured that if Jockstrap appeared and discovered that he couldn't leave the middle of the ocean, and he couldn't have a party where he was, he'd get bored and wouldn't hang around for long.

From Philana's cabin he called an attorney who informed him that the case was complex but not impossible, and furthermore that it would take a small fortune to resolve. Anthony told him to get to work on it. In the meantime he told the lawyer to start calling neurosurgeons. Unfortunately there were few neurosurgeons capable of implanting, let alone removing, the rider device. The operation wasn't performed that often.

Days passed. A discouraging list of neurosurgeons either turned him down flat or wanted the legal situation clarified first. Anthony told the lawyer to start calling *rich* neurosurgeons who might be able to ride out a lawsuit.

Philana transferred most of her data to Anthony's computer and worked with the whales from the smaller boat. Anthony used her yacht and aquasled and cursed the bad sound quality. At least the yacht's flight capability allowed him to find the Dwellers faster.

As far as the Dwellers went, he had run all at once into a dozen blind alleys. Progress seemed measured in microns.

"What's B1971?" Philana asked once, looking over his shoulder as he typed in data.

"A taste. Perhaps a taste associated with a particular temperature striation. Perhaps an emotion." He shrugged. "Maybe just a metaphor."

"You could ask them."

His soul hardened. "Not yet." Which ended the conversation.

Anthony wasn't sure whether or not he wanted to touch her. He and Jockstrap were at war and Philana seemed not to have entirely made up her mind which side she was on. Anthony slept with Philana on the double mattress in the peak, but they avoided sex. He didn't know whether he was helping her out of love or something else, and while he figured things out, desire was on hold, waiting.

Anthony's time with Philana was occupied mainly by his attempt to teach her to cook. Anything else waited for the situation to grow less opaque. Anthony figured Jockstrap would clarify matters fairly soon.

•

Anthony's heart lurched as looked up from lunch to see the taut, challenging grin on Philana's face. Anthony realized he'd been foolish to expect Telamon to show up only at night, as he always had before.

Anthony drew his lips into an answering grin. He was ready, no matter what the hour.

"Do I know you?" Anthony mocked. "Do we have business?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Philana's appraisal was cold. "I've been called Jockstrap before," Telamon said.

"With good reason, I'm sure."

Telamon lurched to his feet and walked aft. He seemed not to have his sea legs yet. Anthony followed, his nerves dancing. Telamon looked out at the sea and curled Philana's lip as if to say that the water held nothing of interest.

"I want to talk about Philana," Telamon said. "You're keeping her prisoner here."

"She can leave me anytime she wants. Which is more than she can say about you."

"I want the codes to the yacht."

Anthony stepped up to Telamon, held Philana's cold gaze. "You're hurting her," he said.

Telamon stared at him with eyes like obsidian chips. He pushed Philana's long hair out of his face with an unaccustomed gesture. "I'm not the only one, Maldalena. I've got access to her mind, remember."

"Then look in her mind and see what she thinks of you."

A contemptuous smile played about Philana's lips. "I know very well what she thinks of me, and it's probably not what she's told you. Philana is a very sad and complex person, and she is not always truthful."

"She's what you made her."

"Precisely my next point." He waved his arm stiffly, unnaturally. The gesture brought him off-balance, and Philana's body swayed for a moment as Telamon adjusted to the tossing of the boat. "I gave her money, education, knowledge of the world. I have corrected her errors, taught her much. She is, in many ways, my creation. Her feelings toward me are ambiguous, as any child's feelings would be toward her father."

"Daddy Jockstrap." Anthony laughed. "Do we have business, Daddy? Or are you going to take your daughter's body to a party first?"

Anthony jumped backwards, arms flailing, as Philana disappeared, her place taken by a young man with curly dark hair and bright blue eyes. The stranger was dressed in a white cotton shirt unbuttoned to the navel and a pair of navy blue swimming trunks. He had seen the man before on vid, showing off his chest hairs. The grin stayed the same from one body to the next.

"She's gone, Maldalena. I teleported her to someplace safe." He laughed. "I'll buy her a new boat. Do what you like with the old one."

Anthony's heart hammered. He had forgotten the Kyklopes could do that, just teleport without the apparatus required by humans. And teleport other things as well.

He wondered how many centuries old the Kyklops' body was. He knew the mind's age was measured in eons.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"This doesn't end it," Anthony said.

Telamon's tone was mild. "Perhaps I'll find a nice planet for you somewhere, Maldalena. Let you play Robinson Crusoe, just as you did when you were young."

"That will only get you in trouble. Too many people know about this situation by now. And it won't be much fun holding Philana wherever you've got her."

Telamon stepped toward the stern, sat on the taffrail. His movements were fluid, far more confident than they had been when he was wearing the other, unaccustomed body. For a moment Anthony considered kicking Telamon into the drink, then decided against it. The possible repercussions had a cosmic dimension that Anthony preferred not to contemplate.

"I don't dislike you, Maldalena," the alien said. "I truly don't. You're an alcoholic, violent lout, but at least you have proven intelligence, perhaps a kind of genius."

"Call the kettle black again. I liked that part."

Two Notches' smooth body rose a cable's length to starboard. He exhaled with an audible hiss, mist drifting over his back. Telamon gave the whale a disinterested look, then turned back to Anthony.

"Being the nearest thing to a parent on the planet," he said. "I must say that I disapprove of you as a partner for Philana. However—" He gave a shrug. "Parents must know when to compromise in these matters." He looked up at Anthony with his blue eyes. "I propose we share her, Anthony. Formalize the arrangement we already seem to possess. I'll only occupy a little of her time, and for all the rest, the two of you can live out your lives with whatever sad domestic bliss you can summon. Till she gets tired of you, anyway."

Two Notches rolled under the waves. A cetacean murmur echoed off the boat's bottom. Anthony's mind flailed for an answer. He felt sweat prickling his scalp. He shook his head in feigned disbelief.

"Listen to yourself, Telamon. Is this supposed to be a scientist talking? A researcher?"

"You don't want to share?" The young man's face curled in disdain. "You want everything for yourself—the whole planet, I suppose, like your father."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"I know what Philana knows about you, and I've done some checking on my own. You brought the humpbacks here because you needed them. Away from *their* home, *their* kind. You *asked* them, I'm sure; but there's no way they could make an informed decision about this planet, about what they were doing. You needed them for your Dweller study, so you took them."

As if on cue, Two Notches rose from the water to take a breath. Telamon

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

favored the whale with his taut smile. Anthony floundered for an answer while the alien spoke on.

"You've got data galore on the Dwellers, but do you publish? Do you share it with anybody, even with Philana? You hoard it all for yourself, all your specialized knowledge. You don't even talk to the Dwellers!" Telamon gave a scornful laugh. "You don't even want the *Dwellers* to know what Anthony knows!"

Anger poured through Anthony's veins like a scalding fire. He clenched his fists, considered launching himself at Telamon. Something held him back.

The alien stood, walked to Anthony, looked him up and down. "We're not so different," he said. "We both want what's ours. But *I'm* willing to share. Philana can be our common pool of data, if you like. Think about it."

Anthony swung, and in that instant Philana was back, horror in her eyes. Anthony's fist, aimed for the taller Telamon's chin, clipped Philana's temple and she fell back, flailing. Anthony caught her.

"It just happened, didn't it?" Her voice was woeful.

"You don't remember?"

Philana's face crumpled. She swayed and touched her temple. "I never do. The times when he's running me are just blank spots."

Anthony seated her on the port bench. He was feeling queasy at having hit her. She put her face in her hands. "I hate when that happens in front of people I know," she said.

"He's using you to hide behind. He was here in person, the son of a bitch." He took her hands in his own and kissed her. Purest desire flamed through him. He wanted to commit an act of defiance, make a statement of the nature of things. He put his arms around her and kissed her nape. She smelled faintly of pine, and there were needles in her hair. Telamon had put her on Earth, then, in a forest somewhere.

She strained against his tight embrace. "I don't know if this is a good idea," she said.

"I want to send a message to Telamon," Anthony said.

They made love under the sun, lying on the deck in Anthony's cockpit. Clear as a bell, Anthony heard Dweller sounds rumbling up the boat. Somewhere in the boat a metal mounting bracket rang to the subsonics. Philana clutched at him. There was desperation in her look, a search for affirmation, despair at finding none. The teak punished Anthony's palms. He wondered if Telamon had ever possessed her thus, took over her mind so that he could fuck her in his own body, commit incest with himself. He found the idea exciting.

His orgasm poured out, stunning him with its intensity. He kissed the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

moist juncture of Philana's neck and shoulder, and rose on his hands to stare down into Telamon's brittle grin and cold, knowing eyes.

"Message received, Anthony." Philana's throat convulsed in laughter. "You're taking possession. Showing everyone who's boss."

Horror galvanized Anthony. He jumped to his feet and backed away, heart pounding. He took a deep breath and mastered himself, strove for words of denial and could not find them. "You're sad, Telamon," he said.

Telamon threw Philana's arms over her head, parted her legs. "Let's do it again, Anthony." Taunting. "You're so masterful."

Anthony turned away. "Piss off, Telamon, you sick fuck." Bile rose in his throat.

"What happened?" Anthony knew Philana was back. He turned and saw her face crumple. "We were making love!" she wailed.

"A cheap trick. He's getting desperate." He squatted by her and tried to take her in his arms. She turned away from him.

"Let me alone for a while," she said. Bright tears filled her eyes.

Misplaced adrenaline ran charges through Anthony's body—no one to fight, no place to run. He picked up his clothes and went below to the main cabin. He drew on his clothing and sat on one of the berths, hands helpless on the seat beside him. He wanted to get blind drunk.

Half an hour later Philana entered the cabin. She'd braided her hair, drawn it back so tight from her temples it must have been painful. Her movements were slow, as if suddenly she'd lost her sea legs. She sat down at the little kitchen table, pushed away her half-eaten lunch.

"We can't win," she said.

"There's got to be some way," Anthony said tonelessly. He was clean out of ideas.

Philana looked at Anthony from reddened eyes. "We can give him what he wants," she said.

"No."

Her voice turned to a shout. "It's not *you* he does this to! It's not you who winks out of existence in the middle of doing laundry or making love, and wakes up somewhere else." Her knuckles were white as they gripped the table edge. "I don't know how long I can take this."

"All your life," said Anthony, "if you give him what he wants."

"At least then he wouldn't use it as a *weapon*!" Her voice was a shout. She turned away.

Anthony looked at her, wondered if he should go to her. He decided not to. He was out of comfort for the present.

"You see," Philana said, her head still turned away, "why I don't want to live forever."

"Don't let him beat you."

"It's not that. I'm afraid . . ." Her voice trembled. "I'm afraid that if

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I got old I'd *become* him. The Kyklopes are the oldest living things ever discovered. And a lot of the oldest immortals are a lot like them. Getting crazier, getting . . ." She shook her head. "Getting less human all the time."

Anthony saw a body swaying in the smokehouse. Philana's body, her fingernails trailing in the dust. Pain throbbed in his chest. He stood up, swayed as he was caught by a slow wave of vertigo. Somewhere his father was laughing, telling him he should have stayed on Lees for a life of pastoral incest.

"I want to think," he said. He stepped past her on the way to his computer. He didn't reach out to touch her as he passed. She didn't reach for him, either.

He put on the headphones and listened to the Dwellers. Their speech rolled up from the deep. Anthony sat unable to comprehend, his mind frozen. He was helpless as Philana. Whose was the next move? he wondered. His? Philana's?

Whoever made the next move, Anthony knew, the game was Telamon's.

At dinnertime Philana made a pair of sandwiches for Anthony, then returned to the cabin and ate nothing herself. Anthony ate one sandwich without tasting it, gave the second to the fish. The Dweller speech had faded out. He left his computer and stepped into the cabin. Philana was stretched out on one of the side berths, her eyes closed. One arm was thrown over her forehead.

Her body, Anthony decided, was too tense for this to be sleep. He sat on the berth opposite.

"He said you haven't told the truth," Anthony said.

Anthony could see Philana's eyes moving under translucent lids as she evaluated this statement, scanning for meaning. "About what," she said.

"About your relationship to him."

Her lips drew back, revealing teeth. Perhaps it was a smile.

"I've known him all my life. I gave you the condensed version."

"Is there more I should know?"

There was another pause. "He saved my life."

"Good for him."

"I got involved with this man. Three or four hundred years old, one of my professors in school. He was going through a crisis—he was a mess, really. I thought I could do him some good. Telamon disagreed, said the relationship was sick." Philana licked her lips. "He was right," she said.

Anthony didn't know if he really wanted to hear about this.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The guy started making demands. Wanted to get married, leave Earth, start over again."

"What did you want?"

Philana shrugged. "I don't know. I hadn't made up my mind. But Telamon went into my head and confronted the guy and told him to get lost. Then he just took me out of there. My body was half the galaxy away, all alone on an undeveloped world. There were supplies, but no gates out."

Anthony gnawed his lip. This was how Telamon operated.

"Telamon kept me there for a couple weeks till I calmed down. He took me back to Earth. The professor had taken up with someone else, another one of his students. He married her, and six weeks later she walked out on him. He killed her, then killed himself."

Philana sighed, drew her hand over her forehead. She opened her eyes and sat up, swinging her legs off the berth. "So," she said. "That's one Telamon story. I've got more."

"When did this happen?"

"I'd just turned eighteen." She shook her head. "That's when I signed the contract that keeps him in my head. I decided that I couldn't trust my judgment about people. And Telamon's judgment of people is, well, quite good."

Resentment flamed in Anthony at this notion. Telamon had made his judgment of Anthony clear, and Anthony didn't want it to become a subject for debate. "You're older now," he said. "He can't have a veto on your life forever."

Philana drew up her legs and circled her knees with her arms. "You're violent, Anthony."

Anthony looked at her for a long moment of cold anger. "I hit you by accident. I was aiming at *him*, damn it."

Philana's jaw worked as she returned his stare. "How long before you aim at *me*?"

"I wouldn't."

"That's what my old professor said."

Anthony turned away, fury running through him like chill fire. Philana looked at him levelly for a moment, then dropped her forehead to her knees. She sighed. "I don't know, Anthony. I don't know anymore. If I ever did."

Anthony stared fixedly at the distant white dwarf, just arrived above the horizon and visible through the hatch. We are, he thought, in a condition of permanent bafflement. "What do you want, Philana?" he asked.

Her head came up, looked at him. "I want not to be a tennis ball in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

your game with Telamon, Anthony. I want to know I'm not just the prize given the winner."

"I wanted you before I ever met Telamon, Philana."

"Telamon changed a few things." Her voice was cold. "Before you met him, you didn't use my body to send messages to people."

Anthony's fists clenched. He forced them to relax.

Philana's voice was bitter. "Seems to me, Anthony, that's one of Telamon's habits you're all too eager to adopt."

Anthony's chest ached. He didn't seem able to breathe in enough air. He took a long breath and hoped his tension would ease. It didn't. "I'm sorry," he said. "It's not . . . a normal situation."

"For you, maybe."

Silence hung in the room, broken only by the whale clicks and mutters rising through the boat. Anthony shook his head. "What do we do, then?" he asked. "Surrender?"

"If we have to." She looked at him. "I'm willing to fight Telamon, but not to the point where one of us is destroyed." She leaned toward him, her expression intent. "And if Telamon wins, could you live with it?" she asked. "With surrender? If we had to give him what he wanted?"

"I don't know."

"I *have* to live with it. You don't. That's the difference."

"That's *one* difference." He took a breath, then rose from his place. "I have to think," he said.

He climbed into the cockpit. Red sunset was splattered like blood across the windscreen. He tried to breathe the sea air, clear the heaviness he felt in his chest, but it didn't work. Anthony went up onto the flybridge and stared foward. His eyes burned as the sun went down in flames.

The white dwarf was high overhead when Anthony came down. Philana was lying in the forepeak, covered with a sheet, her eyes staring sightlessly out the open hatch. Anthony took his clothes off and crawled in beside her.

"I'll surrender," he said. "If I have to, I'll surrender." She turned to him and put her arms around him. Hopeless desire burned in his belly.

He made love to Philana, his nerves numb to the possibility that Telamon might reappear. Her hungry mouth drank in his pain. He didn't know whether this was affirmation or not, whether this meant anything other than the fact there was nothing left to do at this point than stagger blindly into one another's embrace.

A Dweller soloed from below, the clearest Anthony had ever heard one. WE CALL TO OURSELVES, the Dweller said, WE SPEAK OF THINGS AS THEY ARE. Anthony rose from bed and set his computer to record. Sings

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of Others, rising alongside to breathe, called a hello. Anthony tapped his keys, hit TRANSMIT.

Air Human and I are in a condition of rut, he said.

WE CONGRATULATE ANTHONY AND AIR HUMAN ON OUR CONDITION OF RUT, Sings of Others responded. The whooping whale cries layered atop the thundering Dweller noises. WE WISH OURSELVES MANY HAPPY COPULATIONS.

HAPPY COPULATIONS, HAPPY COPULATIONS, echoed Two Notches.

A pointless optimism began to resonate in Anthony's mind. He sat before the computer and listened to the sounds of the Deep Dwellers as they rumbled up his spine.

Philana appeared at the hatch. She was buttoning her shirt. "You told the whales about us?" she said.

"Why not?"

She grinned faintly. "I guess there's no reason not to."

Two Notches wailed a question. ARE ANTHONY AND AIR HUMAN COPULATING NOW?

Not at present, Anthony replied.

WE HOPE YOU WILL COPULATE OFTEN.

Philana, translating the speech on her own, laughed. "Tell them we hope so, too," she said.

And then she stiffened. Anthony's nerves poured fire. Philana turned to him and regarded him with Telamon's eyes.

"I thought you'd see reason," Telamon said. "*I'll surrender.* I like that."

Anthony looked at the possessed woman and groped for a vehicle for his message. Words seemed inadequate, he decided, but would have to do. "You haven't won yet," he said.

Philana's head cocked to one side as Telamon viewed him. "Has it occurred to you," Telamon said, "that if she's free of me, she won't need you at all?"

"You forget something. I'll be rid of *you* as well."

"You can be rid of me any time."

Anthony stared at Telamon for a moment, then suddenly he laughed. He had just realized how to send his message. Telamon looked at him curiously. Anthony turned to his computer deck and flipped to the Dweller translation file.

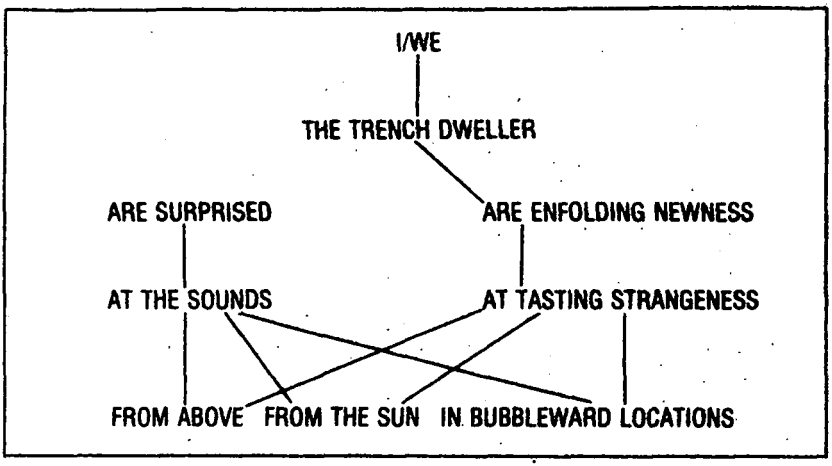
I/we, he typed, *live in the warm brightness above. I am new to this world, and send good wishes to the Dwellers below.*

Anthony pressed TRANSMIT. Rolling thunder boomed from the boat's speakers. The grammar was probably awful, Anthony knew, but he was fairly certain of the words, and he thought the meaning would be clear.

Telamon frowned, stepped to gaze over Anthony's shoulder.

Calls came from below. A translation tree appeared on the screen.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



"Trench Dweller" was probably one of the Dwellers' names. "Bubbleward" was a phrase for "up," since bubbles rose to the surface. Anthony tapped the keys.

We are from far away, recently arrived. We are small and foreign to the world. We wish to brush the Dwellers with our thoughts. We regret our lack of clarity in diction.

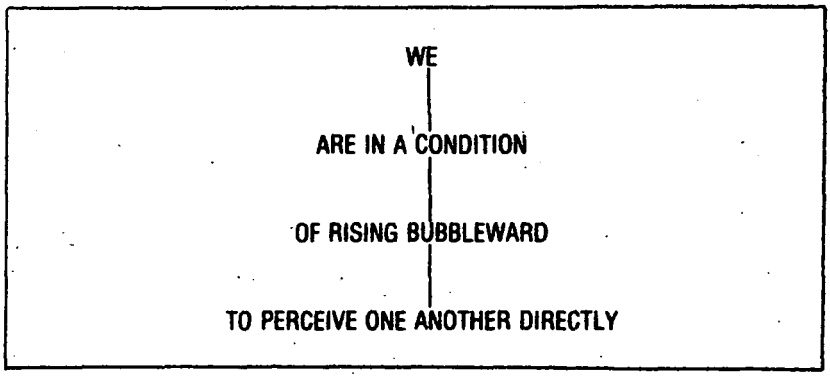
"I wonder if you've thought this through," Telamon said.

Anthony hit TRANSMIT. Speakers boomed. The subsonics were like a punch in the gut.

"Go jump off a cliff," Anthony said.

"You're making a mistake," said Telamon.

The Dweller's answer was surprisingly direct.



Anthony's heart crashed in astonishment. Could the Dwellers stand

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the lack of pressure on the surface? *I/We*, he typed, *Trench Dweller, proceed with consideration for safety. I/We recollect that we are small and weak.* He pressed TRANSMIT and flipped to the whalespeech file.

Deep Dweller rising to surface, he typed. *Run fast northward.*

The whales answered with cries of alarm. Flukes pounded the water. Anthony ran to the cabin and cranked the wheel hard to starboard. He increased speed to separate himself from the humpbacks. Behind him, Telamon stumbled in his unfamiliar body as the boat took the waves at a different angle.

Anthony returned to his computer console. *I/We are in a state of motion*, he reported. *Is living in the home of the light occasion for a condition of damage to us/Trench Dweller?*

"You're mad," said Telamon, and then Philana staggered. "He's done it *again*," she said in a stunned voice. She stepped to the starboard bench and sat down. "What's happening?" she asked.

"I'm talking to the Dwellers. One of them is rising to say hello."

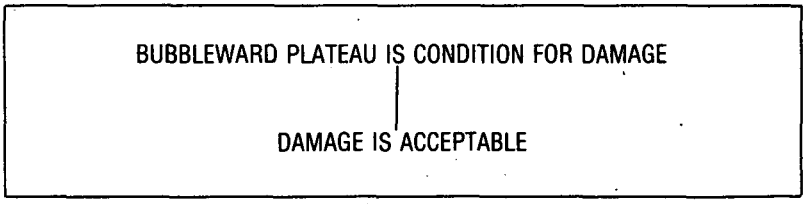
"Now?"

He gave her a skeletal grin. "It's what you wanted, yes?" She stared at him.

I'm going over cliffs, he thought. One after another.

That, Anthony concluded, is the condition of existence.

Subsonics rattled crockery in the kitchen.



Anthony typed, *I/We happily await greeting ourselves* and pressed TRANSMIT, then REPEAT. He would give the Dweller a sound to home in on.

"I don't understand," Philana said. He moved to join her on the bench, put his arm around her. She shrugged him off. "Tell me," she said. He took her hand.

"We're going to win."

"How?"

"I don't know yet."

She was too shaken to argue. "It's going to be a long fight," she said.

"I don't care."

Philana took a breath. "I'm scared."

"So am I," said Anthony.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The boat beat itself against the waves. The flying yacht followed, a silent shadow.

Anthony and Philana waited in silence until the Dweller rose, a green-grey mass that looked as if a grassy reef had just calved. Foam roared from its back as it broke water, half an ocean running down its sides. Anthony's boat danced in the sudden white tide, and then the ocean stilled. Bits of the Dweller were all around, spread over the water for leagues—tentacles, filters, membranes. The Dweller's very mass had calmed the sea. The Dweller was so big, Anthony saw, it constituted an entire ecosystem. Sea creatures lived among its folds and tendrils: some had died as they rose, their swim bladders exploding in the release of pressure; others leaped and spun and shrank from the brightness above.

Sunlight shone from the Dweller's form, and the creature pulsed with life.

Terrified, elated, Philana and Anthony rose to say hello. ●

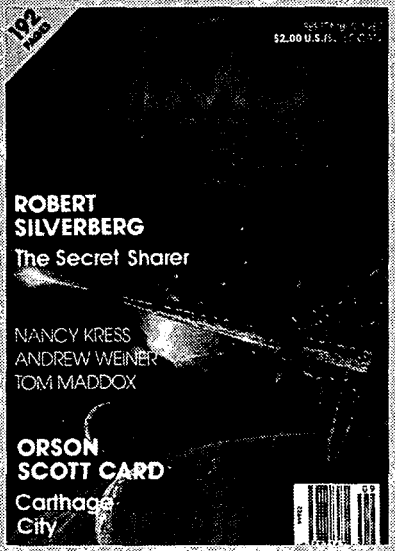
DYING IN OTHER WORLDS: COCTEAU

On Cocteau they say,
It is much the same as Earth,
Except the body never deteriorates.
It changes.
Slowly, from flesh
To another substance,
Highly valued
By the Talthan émigrés.
Under contract and with great ritual,
It is exumed
And made into religious artifacts
Which the Talha, who know no death
And so worship it,
Purchase.

—Roger Dutcher

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THIS YEAR ENTER ANOTHER DIMENSION.



SUBSCRIBE NOW AND SAVE 25% OFF THE COVER PRICE

CALL TOLL-FREE 1-800-247-2160

(Iowa residents Call 1-800-362-2860)

☐ Please send me 18 issues of ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE for only $26.97—I save 25% off the newsstand price.

☐ Please send me 8 issues for only $11.97.

Mail to: **Isaac Asimov's**
P.O. Box 1933
Marion, Ohio 43305

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

☐ Payment Enclosed ☐ Bill Me

☐ Charge (Circle one) MasterCard VISA

Card# _____

Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

OUTSIDE US & POSS., 8 for $13.97, 18 FOR $29.97 (CASH WITH ORDER US FUNDS). PLEASE ALLOW 6-8 WEEKS FOR DELIVERY OF YOUR FIRST ISSUE.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

Carpet Boogers

Weaveworld
By Clive Barker
Simon & Schuster, $19.95

Just before the turn of the last century, most of the fairy folk (who call themselves the Seerkind) in the world disappeared. Not because of their alienation from humankind (whom they called Cuckoos, and the real world the Kingdom of the Cuckoos), though that was bad and getting worse, but because Something (which they dubbed the Scourge) had appeared from nowhere that was destroying them. So they picked up all their favorite places (houses, rooms, glens, hills, etc.), went to England, and had the whole caboodle and themselves woven into a rug.

A what?

A rug.

Segue to modern Liverpool. The Guardian of the rug (a half Seerkind, half human) dies, and the rug (a/k/a The Fugue, a/k/a Weaveworld) is up for grabs. Involved in the grabbing are the ex-Guardian's granddaughter, Suzanna, who has inherited her powers, and Cal, an innocent bystanding Liverpudlian, and some really nasty renegade Seerkind and their even nastier supernatural helpers.

Eventually, the rug unweaves and the Weaveworld occupies a large area of suburban Liverpool, spilling out all sorts of creatures and things. Then it gets *re*woven, and the chase is on again, Suzanna having grabbed the carpet. Various other factors let loose from the Weaveworld are now added. Again the thing unravels, this time in a glen in Scotland (at least wreaking less havoc with the locals). When the baddies penetrate the Loom, the inner workings of the "place," the whole thing goes bust, stranding a lot of fey folk in the Cuckoo Kingdom, i.e., the real world.

Then the villains go off to Arabia (which they seem to have no trouble getting into—apparently this "real" world has no Middle East problems), and rouse the Scourge (remember the Scourge?), which has been vegetating in the most barren quadrant of that barren country. Seems that the Scourge *thinks* it's the Angel Uriel, guarding the remains of what may have been Eden, from whence came the Seerkind (remember the Seerkind?).

There's a final scrimmage between Cal and the Scourge (a/k/a Uriel). Cal wins with the help of a magic artifact handily provided by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a character who's been briefly introduced earlier, and whose purpose is all too obviously to provide a *deus ex machina* at the end.

If this sounds a little deliriously inscrutable, it is—and it goes on forever. It's the big modern fantasy in an uneasy wedding with the big modern horror novel—the outline above may sound somewhat whimsical, but there are endless unpleasant deaths, exploding bodies and scorched corpses littering the landscape. The effect is something like that of Crowley's *Little Big* without the elegant writing, and with an extra layer of excrement and, of course, blood. (Part of Suzanna's inherited magic is a sort of mystical liquid power called the *menstrum*).

There are evidences of the influence of Charles Williams, C. S. Lewis, and Alan Garner, but when those eminent British fantasists conjured up ancient powers into the mundane modern world, the results were frightening and awesome. (The sequence in Garner's "juvenile" *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* in which an ordinary English countryside is crawling with magical creatures is particularly hair-raising.)

Here the results are more incoherent and jejunely out to shock. The Weaveworld itself is modern and lumpen, its people like characters in a Bette Midler movie and its sorcery arbitrary and woozily surrealist. This is yuppie fantasy, with its quota of nastiness thrown in for shock value and no reverberations of magic or mystery. It's a surprise it was published in the fall and not early in summer, for reading on the beach when the boy/girl-watching gets dull.

Reich Triumphant

Budspy

By David Dvorkin

Franklin Watts, $17.95

World War II ended in 1943 with the hero's death of Adolf Hitler on the Russian Front. After a brief power struggle within the Nazi party, a relatively obscure assistant secretary to the Fuehrer, Kurt Nebel, assumed control.

He made peace with Roosevelt and Churchill, but the Reich kept its European conquests. The Eastern Front was maintained almost as a perpetual war with Bolshevik Russia, as a training ground for the army.

Nebel kept power for over forty years; in that period, Nazism gentrified itself into National Socialism, and Nebel, along with Speer and other moderates, got rid of Hitler's excesses (at least publicly). A Jewish state called Israel was even established for the survivors of the camps; it remained within the German sphere of influence, along with all of Europe and others such as South Africa and Argentina.

Berlin is the greatest city in the world, filled with the monumental architecture envisioned by Speer and Hitler. The U.S. is still considered a superpower, but its cities are deteriorating, its people are pov-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

erty-stricken and its goods nowhere near the quality of German-made. Its democratic system has been influenced by the Third Reich, especially since the assassination of President McCarthy in the 1960s.

It is against this fascinating and well-thought-out alternate history that David Dvorkin has set *Budspy*. The title refers to the hero, who is a crack member of the American secret police, the Ombudsman Commission, founded by President McCarthy. The agents are known as Budsmen or Budspies. Dvorkin's foreground plot is not quite so effective as his background. Chic, the Budspy, is sent to Berlin to uncover a leak in the American Embassy there—German secrets being passed to the Russians. While you're led to believe that Chic is a more-than-competent agent, his behavior makes one wonder.

He gets involved with all sorts of women, has his cover blown time and again, and generally is so busy cavorting in bed that (unlike 007, who does this sort of thing in style) he doesn't get down to agenting for weeks. When he does, it's by sheer luck that he uncovers the leak. 'Tis one of the ladies he's been bedding; she tells all, and leads him to the Russian terrorists who've been doing things such as blowing up Adolf's tomb (Chic, conveniently on hand, discovers it to be empty). With the help of the "Gesipo" (the new Gestapo), to which belongs *another* of his friendly ladies, he rounds them up, then goes home to brood about the *Realpolitik* he's discovered. The finale of the novel is about as unlikely as any I've come across in years.

In short, Dvorkin paints a nice backdrop, but what his actors are doing in front of it could be a little more convincing.

Lions and Tigers and . . .

Blood of the Tiger

By Rose Estes

Bantam, $3.50 (paper)

Way back when, stories of prehistoric man always seemed to be called something like *Ug, Son of Og* and it was *de rigueur* in each one that the hero, U son of O, would be the one to come up with some handy dandy discovery like fire. This is what gave the story some oomph, since there's a limit as to how many saber-toothed tigers you can escape from without tedium setting in.

Then primitive (wo)man got sophisticated, and the range of his/her emotional and physical lives broadened, running the gamut from soapstone operas such as *Clan of the Cave Bear* to the intriguing works of Bjorn Kurten (*Dance of the Tiger* and its sequel).

Rose Estes' *Blood of the Tiger* sort of takes us back to when life was simple. Oh, the hero's name is an advance on Ug. He's called Emri and he belongs to the Tiger Clan. He rescues a younger boy of the despised Toad Clan (as well as a saber-toothed lion cub) from wolves, and gets kicked out of the clan for his troubles. The evil Shaman wants

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him out anyhow. Emri's father was the rightful chief, but he and several other leading members of the tribe have died under suspicious circumstances.

So Emri and Hawk, the Toad, and Mosca, the lion cub, go off to survive on their own, and have Adventures. Chief among these is spending the winter with a pride of cave lions, to whom Mosca has provided entree, and it is these that provide Emri with his Discovery, which is that animals are people, too, or at least something beyond things to eat or be eaten by.

This volume ends with a battle royal between the Shaman and the clan's totem saber-toothed tiger on one side, and Emri & Friends on the other. I specify *this* volume because, as seems inevitable these days, this is only the first volume of the "Saga of the Lost Lands." It's pretty simple stuff. Emri and Hawk talk in a rather modern style ("Check it out to be sure there are no snakes."), and there's a bothersome lack of sense of time or place—i.e., it's sort of all-purpose primitive man in all-purpose primitive world. Nonetheless, the book's heart is in the right place, and there are sufficient perils and other action to satisfy the addict who needs a neolithic fix.

Illusions

Alqua Dreams

By Rachel Pollack
Franklin Watts, $16.95

Have you ever had the awful feeling of frustration of arguing with a devotee of solipsism or Hinduism or any of the other isms that maintain that the world is an illusion of one kind or another, that it's "all in your mind"? There's no way *in* the world to prove them wrong. (It's like arguing with the Creationists about the world suddenly appearing six thousand and whatever many years ago complete with fossils and geological strata —go on—*prove* it didn't happen.) That's the situation Jaimi Cooper finds himself in in Rachel Pollack's *Alqua Dreams*. Cooper works for "the Company," which apparently is the interstellar body responsible for finding and mining rhovium, the mineral which makes interstellar flight possible. Any rhovium deposit is considered to belong to the nearest indigenous inhabitants, and they must be given whatever of Earth culture they desire (within reason) for the mineral rights.

It's Cooper's job to get the local rights from a group called the Lukai on the planet Keela. The problem is that they believe that they're all dead and that the world around them is illusory. They live in the ruins of an advanced technology, and they are fed and clothed by the surviving machines. But there is *nothing* they want.

The novel is devoted to Cooper's attempts to solve this problem and, while Pollack is a smooth and thoughtful writer, the idea runs out of steam all too soon—the story keeps threatening to turn into a philosophical disquisition.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Murderous Atmosphere

Station Gehenna
By Andrew Weiner
Congdon & Weed, $15.95

Was it accident or suicide? Or maybe murder? This question, common enough in detective thrillers, has also been known to emerge in SF stories, and quite successfully, too. One wonders why SF has not developed a persistent sleuth with a multiple solution record. Even the best of the bunch in the field have only a handful of solved crimes to their credit.

There *is* a particularly tricky side to SF murder mysteries, and that is that it isn't cricket to use an out-of-left-field factor in the crime. In other words, for the murder weapon to be the newly invented pocket laser-quasar which teleports a bit of gristle into the victim's windpipe at dinner, and the existence of which nobody in the cast knows, is cheating. The whole trick in murder mysteries is the skillful manipulation of the *known*. On the other hand, much of the fun of SF is the revelation and use of the *unknown*.

Andrew Weiner treads a fine line between the two in his *Station Gehenna*, and for the most part makes it work. His form is the limited number of people in the isolated setting, here the only work station on the planet Gehenna, which is in the process of being terraformed. To step outside unprotected in Gehenna's lethal atmosphere is death, but that's just what one of the personnel did. This despite a computer controlled safety scan on the lock.

There are only five other people in the station. On the scene arrives a psychologist in the investigative field services for the R. G. Spooner Interplanetary Development Corp., which is running the show. He is posing as the dead man's replacement as leisure officer. Was it a suicide, as is generally thought?

The conscientious reviewer can give little away, but it's probably safe to mention that there are potentially lethal factors at work on Gehenna, including the facts that certain parties in the company would be glad to see the project fail, that the victim thought that there might be intelligent life outside the station, and that the mix of six in the station personnel seemed particularly emotionally unstable.

The main problem here is similar to one encountered earlier in this column. Our hero is something of a wimp. Though supposedly a crack agent, he blows his cover (partially by being a rotten leisure officer), gets involved with female personnel (and a possible suspect), and is generally spooked by Gehenna. He's such an unappealing lout that one almost hopes that the murderer will get away with it.

Cosmic Rape

To Marry Medusa
By Theodore Sturgeon
Baen, $2.95 (paper)

The original short magazine version was called *To Marry Medusa*. When the novelization appeared in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

book form, back in 1968, it appeared under the title of *The Cosmic Rape*. Now the longer version is being reprinted as *To Marry Medusa. The Cosmic Rape* certainly sounds like one of those names that was tacked onto SF novels back when they supposedly needed sensationalism to sell, but curiously enough, it's the more apt title.

The works of Theodore Sturgeon are highly regarded historically, and *dis*regarded commercially these days, i.e., precious few of them are available. They *are* out of style, there's no denying. And the main reason for this is his enormous liking for and faith in humanity, which is hardly fashionable. It is neither Pollyanna-ish nor of the mankind-is-better-than-anybody school of philosophy typical of much of the Golden Age (to which Sturgeon was a unique contributor). When humanity wins, it is always in the best possible way.

To Marry Medusa is typical, but I can't cite the exact circumstances, because that would spoil the neat surprise of the finale. (SF reviewers must sometimes exercise as much caution as mystery reviewers.) The major concern of the novel is an alien "seed," which has landed, gone through two birds and a horse, ended up via the latter in a hamburger, and then been picked out of a garbage can by a really loathsome example of humanity. Gurlick is weak, filthy, stupid, and cruel—a thieving bum with no redeeming social values whatsoever, not even quaintness.

Through the seed, Gurlick is linked to an awesome superbeing which controls the myriad races of two galaxies plus much of our own. It has incorporated these races into its own being, while they pursue their various lifestyles. It intends to absorb humanity. However, there is a problem. Never before has the superbeing, the Medusa, run into a race of technically adept *individuals*; all its "subject" races have been hive minds. It can only believe that somehow our race became fragmented under threat. Through Gurlick it builds a machine, which builds a bigger machine, which builds an even bigger machine, which builds a fleet of machines capable of mentally "reuniting" humanity—all of this in a night. Then, once humanity is reunited, the genetically manipulated Gurlick will impregnate any human woman with his alien seed, and—mission accomplished.

But it doesn't work out that way.

Gurlick's story is alternated by chapter with typically Sturgeonesque sketches of various "ordinary" people (Sturgeonesque ordinary is far from . . .). All of these unite in the finale (and if you know Sturgeon's favorite theme, you'll know how loaded that phrase is).

There are two minor miracles in this old novel. One is the range of knowledge displayed, from vocabulary to random scientific facts thrown in as rationales. It makes many current writers look illiterate (and this reviewer feel so). The other is the story's incredible brev-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ity. Even in the longer version, it can be almost read at a sitting, but what a wallop it packs! It's not for those who buy their reading by the pound. But for those who buy quality, it's worth twice the price.

Unreview

So far as I'm concerned, the purpose of this column is to inform you, the readers, about some of the interesting books that are among the hundreds that come into print yearly, and, more rarely, send up a warning about some of the clinkers. Anything above and beyond that purpose is peripheral and perhaps self-indulgent. But I'm going to be a little self-indulgent this month. Some issues back I registered a complaint about the amount of good science fiction and fantasy from the past that is out of print, i.e., not available even if you could find a bookseller that would order for you.

Recently I had occasion to draw up a list of several hundred works in the two genres for one of the classier mainstream review periodicals; it was a list that was selective and subjective, but I did try to include most of the books of good repute that have been published down through the years. In the process of research, I must admit to being taken aback at the number of such books from the past that are out of print, even though I had been complaining about that very matter.

So, as a sort of antireview, let me lament the current lack of availability of Poul Anderson's *The Broken Sword*, J. G. Ballard's *Vermilion Sands*, James Blish's *Black Easter* or its sequel, *The Day After Judgment*, John Christopher's *No Blade of Grass*, Lord Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, David Gerrold's *The Man Who Folded Himself*, M. John Harrison's *The Pastel City*, William Hope Hodgson's *The Night Land*, almost all the works of Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore, Tanith Lee's *Don't Bite the Sun*, Fritz Leiber's *The Big Time, anything* by A. Merritt (!!), Keith Roberts's *Pavane*, Joanna Russ' *And Chaos Died*, Robert Stallman's "Beast trilogy," Theodore Sturgeon's *E Pluribus Unicorn*, or A. E. Van Vogt's *Slan*, among many others.

If you *have* found any of those lately, it would probably have been in a British edition. And I would be more than glad to hear that I'm mistaken about any of those titles, or that some of them are coming back into print. (Researching what's in print is not easy—many publishers are not even sure what's available on their own lists, and many keep books listed as in print long after the stock has run out—through carelessness or to avoid complaints from authors).

The big question is *why*. As I've noted before, publishers not unreasonably like at least a small return on anything they publish, and they claim that reprints don't sell. *Is* it that you readers are not interested in the oldie goodies? Or can it be, as rumor has it, those shadowy middlemen whom no one hears

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about, the book buyers for the big chains, who reputedly have much more influence on what gets printed than the plain old readers? If a large chain does not buy a certain title, then a publisher can almost for sure count it as a loss. And if the buyers decide that they're not interested, well . . . So the crucial question is—how much do the buyers know? It would be an interesting question for the SF press to tackle.

In the meantime, it's a sad situation, particularly for those who care about science fiction's heritage and the great books from its past.

Shoptalk

Mea Culpa Dept . . . Since we don't have a staff of researchers constantly on the phone checking facts like *Time* and *Newsweek*, errors do sometimes creep into this column (though ever-alert Sheila has saved us from egg-on-the-face more than once). A reader calls our attention to the fact that James Kahn's *Timefall* is the third of a series and makes more sense in that context. Good to know—nevertheless, acting *in loco readership* (take that phrase as you will), one can only judge it as a single volume since nowhere on the book was that fact noted . . . And the esteemed F. M. Busby took time from writing good stuff to call our attention to the fact that *High Hunt* by David Eddings is not an upcoming component of his *Mallorean* series. It was so reported due to a garbled publisher's release. (Excuses, excuses . . .)

It's So Nice To See You Back Dept . . . In my "Unreview," above, I had a demi-tantrum about various classic works that were out of print. That was the bad news. I can even the balance slightly with the good news, though, that various novels are coming back *into* print after being unavailable for some time. All of these books are of interest in one way or another. I'd like to cite one particular publisher, Carroll & Graf, for their intelligent reprint program. They have, in recent months, reissued these marvelous goodies: John Sladek's hilarious *Roderick* ($3.95, paper); Michael Moorcock's *Behold the Man* ($2.95, paper); Bernard Wolfe's legendary *Limbo* ($4.95, paper); the modern classic *334* by Thomas M. Disch ($3.95, paper); and J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* ($3.95), and *The Terminal Beach* ($3.50, paper). (By the way, expect to see most of Ballard come back into print due to the making of his *Empire of the Sun* into what, for once, is indeed a *major* motion picture.)

Other publishers are doing their bit in a small way. Zenna Henderson's *Pilgrimage: The First Book of the People* has reappeared (Avon, $3.50, paper). The vast legion of cat-fancying fantasy fans (or fantasy-loving aelurophiliacs) should dance in the streets at the re-release of Paul Gallico's get-out-your-handkerchiefs *The Abandoned*, the loveliest cat-fantasy of them all. It has one of the great heroines of literature, Jennie, the alley cat (In-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ternational Polygonics [of all people], $5.95, paper). And for another specialized audience, the homoerotic SF novel, *Chrome*, by George Nader (yes, the '50s movie actor, star of "Robot Monster" et al.), has come out again, a cult novel if ever there was one (Alyson, $7.95, paper).

Recent publications from those associated with this magazine include: *Atlantis: Isaac Asimov's Wonderful Worlds of Fantasy #9* edited by Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg, and Charles G. Waugh, Signet, $3.95 (paper).

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, Suite 133, 380 Bleecker St., N.Y., N.Y. 10014. ●

NEXT ISSUE

Hot new writer **Alexander Jablokov** takes us on a strange cross-time journey next month, in our May cover story, "Many Mansions." Transtemporal Constabulary agent Mathias Pomeranz is hot on the trail of a sinister ring of alien Religion Smugglers, but the trail is an eccentric and dangerous one indeed, taking Mathias from the ancient Rome of Hadrian's day to Ice Age Illinois during the Wurm Glaciation, from thirteenth century France to Akhetaten's New Kingdom Egypt in 1337 B.C. ...and also into a *lot* more trouble than he bargained for! Don't miss this wild and woolly romp through the ages, by one of the genre's most exciting new talents. Our May issue also features what will unfortunately be the last new story by **James Tiptree, Jr.** that you'll ever see anywhere. Tiptree was the pseudonym of retired experimental psychologist Alice Sheldon, and Sheldon's tragic death last year brought an end to "Tiptree's" extraordinary writing career as well. Her last story, "Earth Doth like a Snake Renew," is as brilliantly-quirky and absolutely original as all of her other work, funny, shrewdly-observed, razor-sharp satirical, deliciously sensual...and ultimately quite touching.

Also in May: new writer **Judith Moffett** had quite a year in 1987, winning the Sturgeon Award for her first published story and selling her first novel, *Pennterra*, to our *Isaac Asimov Presents* line (it came out late in the year, to unusually enthusiastic critical response)—next month she makes her *IAsfm* debut with "The Hob," a compassionate, lyrical, and compelling story that we think is going to have quite an impact; **Lisa Goldstein** returns with a hard-hitting study of troubled faith and divided loyalty, in "After the Master"; **Isaac Asimov** serves up the latest George and Azazel story, a prime "Flight of Fancy"; and British author **Ian McDonald** returns after a long absence with a disquieting look into the different worlds that may exist alongside our own, in "King of Morning, Queen of Day." Plus an array of columns and features. Look for our May issue on sale on your newsstands on April 5, 1988.

COMING SOON: new stories by **Howard Waldrop, Connie Willis, Lucius Shepard, James Patrick Kelly, Karen Joy Fowler, Robert Silverberg, Tim Sullivan, Orson Scott Card, Nancy Kress, John Shirley, Stephen Leigh, John Kessel, Eileen Gunn, Walter Jon Williams, Avram Davidson, Melanie Tem, Gregory Frost, Neal Barrett, Jr., Jack McDevitt, Mary Gentle, Steven Popkes, Martha Soukup, Judith Moffett, Phillip C. Jennings, Geoffry A. Landis, Andrew Weiner,** and many others.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

The WorldCon and NASFiC sites for 1990 have been chosen. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists, and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, & a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 [business] envelope) at 4271 Duke St. #D-10, Alexandria VA 22304. The hot line is (703) 823-3117. If a machine answers, leave your area code & number. I'll call back on my nickel. Early evening's often a good time to phone cons (many numbers are homes). Be polite on the phone. When writing, enclose an SASE. Look for me at cons behind the Filthy Pierre badge, making music.

FEBRUARY, 1988

26-28—**Contemplation.** For info, write: **Box 7242, Columbia MO 65205.** Or call: **(314) 442-8135, 445-9775 or 445-4790.** (10 AM to 10 PM, not collect). Con will be held in: Columbia MO (if city omitted, same as in address) at the Ramada. Guests will include: Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle, J. R. Daniels.

26-28—**LUCon.** Leeds University Union, Leeds UK. Bob (Slow Glass) Shaw. By the LU Union SF Society.

MARCH, 1988

4-6—**ConTact. (916) 731-8778.** Days Inn, Rancho Cordova (near Sacramento) CA. Worldbuilding workshop, rather than a traditional con. Anthropology and SF. Theme: "Cultures of the Imagination."

4-6—**ConCave. (502) 586-2266.** Park Mammoth Resort, Park City KY. Lynn Hickman. Relax-a-con.

4-6—**BayFilk. (415) 528-3172.** Airport Hyatt, Oakland CA. The annual West Coast SF folksinging con.

4-6—**ConQuistador. (619) 461-1917.** Bahia Hotel, San Diego, CA. Jerry Pournelle, fan Terry Gish.

11-13—**LunaCon.** Westchester Marriott, Tarrytown, NY (no. of NY City). H. Harrison, N. Blanchard.

18-20—**Draconis, Box 162, Concord MA 01742.** Louisville KY. A. (Pern) McCaffrey, singer J. Ecklar.

18-20—**MidSouthCon, 1229 Pallwood Rd., Memphis TN 38122. (901) 682-2003.** Seventh annual con.

24-27—**AggieCon, MSC Box J-1, TAMU, College Station TX 77844. (409) 845-1515.** On campus.

24-27—**NorwesCon, Box 24207, Seattle WA 98124. (206) 723-2101 or 789-0599.** Tacoma WA.

25-27—**Magnum Opus Con, 4315 Pio Nono Ave., Macon GA 31206. (912) 781-6110.** Columbus GA.

26—**ApriCon. 317 Ferris Booth Hall, Columbia U., New York NY. (212) 280-3611.** By Barn./Col. SF Soc.

APRIL, 1988

1-3—**BaltiCon, Box 686, Baltimore MD 21203.** At 2000 to 3000 members, the biggest SF non-WorldCon.

1-3—**MiniCon, Box 8297, Lake Stn., Minneapolis MN 55408.** This is held each year on Easter weekend.

SEPTEMBER, 1988

1-5—**NoLaCon II, 921 Canal #831, New Orleans LA 70112. (504) 525-6008.** WorldCon. $70, in advance.

AUGUST, 1989

31-Sept. 4—**Noreascon 3, Box 46, MIT PO, Cambridge MA 02139. Boston MA.** WorldCon. Norton.

AUGUST, 1990

23-27—**ConFiction, Box 95370 - 2509 CI. The Hague. Holland.** WorldCon. $45 to at least 11/30/87.

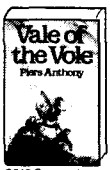
28-Sept. 1—**Con Diego, Box 203534, San Diego CA 92120 (619) 265-0903.** NASFIE $30 to ???

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TAKE ANY 5 BOOKS FOR $1

WITH MEMBERSHIP

SEE OTHER SIDE FOR ADDITIONAL SELECTIONS.



3913 Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $5.98

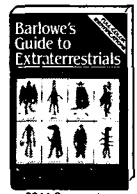
4242 Pub. ed. $16.95
Club ed. $5.98

1362 Pub. ed. $14.95
Club ed. $5.98

3921 Pub. ed. $17.95
Club ed. $4.98

3475 Pub. ed. $15.95
Club ed. $4.98

4226 Pub. ed. $15.95
Club ed. $4.98

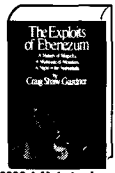


3814 Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $10.98

4234 Pub. ed. $17.95
Club ed. $6.98

★ **3236** Pub. ed.
$19.95
Club ed. $9.98

4275 Pub. ed. $17.95
Club ed. $4.98



3830 A Malady of Magicks; A Multitude of Monsters; A Night in the Netherhells.
Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $6.98

5520 The Sleeping Dragon; The Sword and the Chain; The Silver Crown.
Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $8.98

★ **3731 Night's Master; Death's Master; Delusion's Master.** Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $8.98

★ **3715 Delirium's Mistress; Night's Sorceries.**
Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $7.98

▲ Exclusive hardcover edition
★ Explicit scenes and/or language may be offensive to some.

How the Club Works: You'll receive your 5 books for only $1 (plus shipping and handling) after your application for membership is accepted. We reserve the right to reject any application. However, once accepted as a member, you may examine the books in your home and, if not completely satisfied, return them within 10 days at Club expense. Your membership will be canceled and you'll owe nothing.

About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), we'll send you the Club's bulletin, *Things to Come*, describing the 2 coming Selections and a variety of Alternate choices. In addition, up to 4 times a year you may receive offers of special Selections, always at low Club prices. If you want the 2 Selections, you need do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically.

If you don't want a Selection, prefer an Alternate or no book at all, just fill out the convenient form always provided and return it to us by the date specified.

We allow you at least 10 days for making your decision. If you do not receive the form in time to respond within 10 days and receive an unwanted Selection, you may return it at our expense.

As a member you need buy only 4 books at regular low Club prices during the coming year. You may resign anytime thereafter or continue to enjoy Club benefits for as long as you wish. One of the 2 Selections each month is only $4.98. Other Selections are higher, but always much less than hardcover publishers' editions —UP TO 65% OFF. The Club offers more than 400 books to choose from. Each volume printed on our special presses is produced on high-quality acid-free paper. A shipping and handling charge is added to all shipments. Send no money now, but do mail the coupon today!

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB®

Garden City, NY 11535

I want the best SF in or out of this world! Please accept my application for membership in the Science Fiction Book Club. Send me the 5 books I have numbered in the boxes below, and bill me just $1 (plus shipping and handling). I agree to the Club Plan as described in this ad. I will take 4 more books at regular low Club prices in the coming year and may resign anytime thereafter. SFBC offers serious works for mature readers.

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

CT-950

Mr.
Ms. _____
(Please print)

Address _____ Apt. # _____

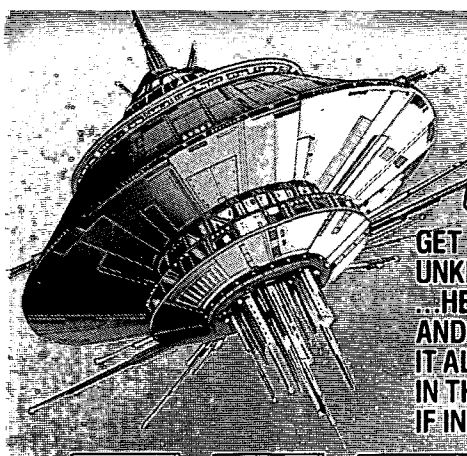
City _____

State _____ Zip _____

If under 18, parent must sign _____

The Science Fiction Book Club offers its own complete hardbound editions sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save you even more. Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Canada. Offer slightly different in Canada. 38-SF02

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

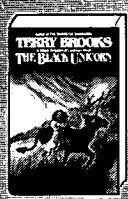


ATTENTION

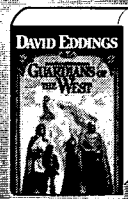
GET READY TO JOURNEY TO EARTHS UNKNOWN...TAMPER WITH EVOLUTION ...HELP SOLVE INTERGALACTIC TURMOIL.. AND MEET NEW FORMS OF ALIEN LIFE. IT ALL BEGINS WITH MEMBERSHIP IN THE SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB. IF INTERESTED, JOIN TODAY!

3939 Pub ed $17.95
Club ed $5.98

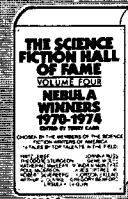
4143 Spec ed ▲
Club ed $4.98



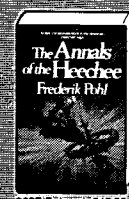
4861 Pub ed $16.95
Club ed $5.98



3806 Pub ed $16.95
Club ed $6.98

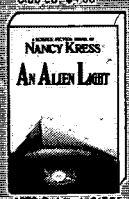


4259 Spec ed ▲
Club ed $6.98



3857 Pub ed $16.95
Club ed $4.98

3889 Spec ed ▲
Club ed $4.98



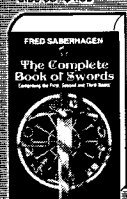
★ 4879 Pub ed $17.95
Club ed $5.98

2584 Pub ed $15.95
Club ed $6.98

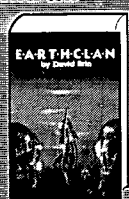
4135 Spec ed ▲
Club ed $5.98

3723 Pub ed $16.95
Club ed $4.98

†4887 Spec ed ▲
Club ed $4.98



1420 Includes the First, Second and Third Books.
Spec ed ▲
Club ed $7.98



4218 Startide Rising; The Uplift War
Spec ed ▲
Club ed $9.98

2543 Dragonflight; Dragonquest; The White Dragon.
Comb pub ed $26.85
Club ed $7.98

0752 Elric of Melnibone; The Sailor on the Seas of Fate; The Weird of the White Wolf.
Spec ed ▲
Club ed $6.98

1172 The Vanishing Tower; The Bane of the Black Sword; Stormbringer.
Spec ed ▲
Club ed $7.98

0075 The First 5 Amber Novels. 2 vols.
Comb pub ed $32.30
Club ed $8.98

TAKE ANY 5 BOOKS FOR $1

WITH MEMBERSHIP.

SEE OTHER SIDE FOR ADDITIONAL SELECTIONS.

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB®

▲ Exclusive hardcover edition.
★ Explicit scenes and/or language may be offensive to some.

†Copyright © 1987 Paramount Pictures Corporation All Rights Reserved.
STAR TREK is a Registered Trademark of Paramount Pictures Corporation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED